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+

40 UNDER 40

—

21 UNDER 21

—

GLOBAL POWER PLAYERS

# TEMS

JET-SETTING WITH NIGERIA'S HISTORY-MAKING STAR

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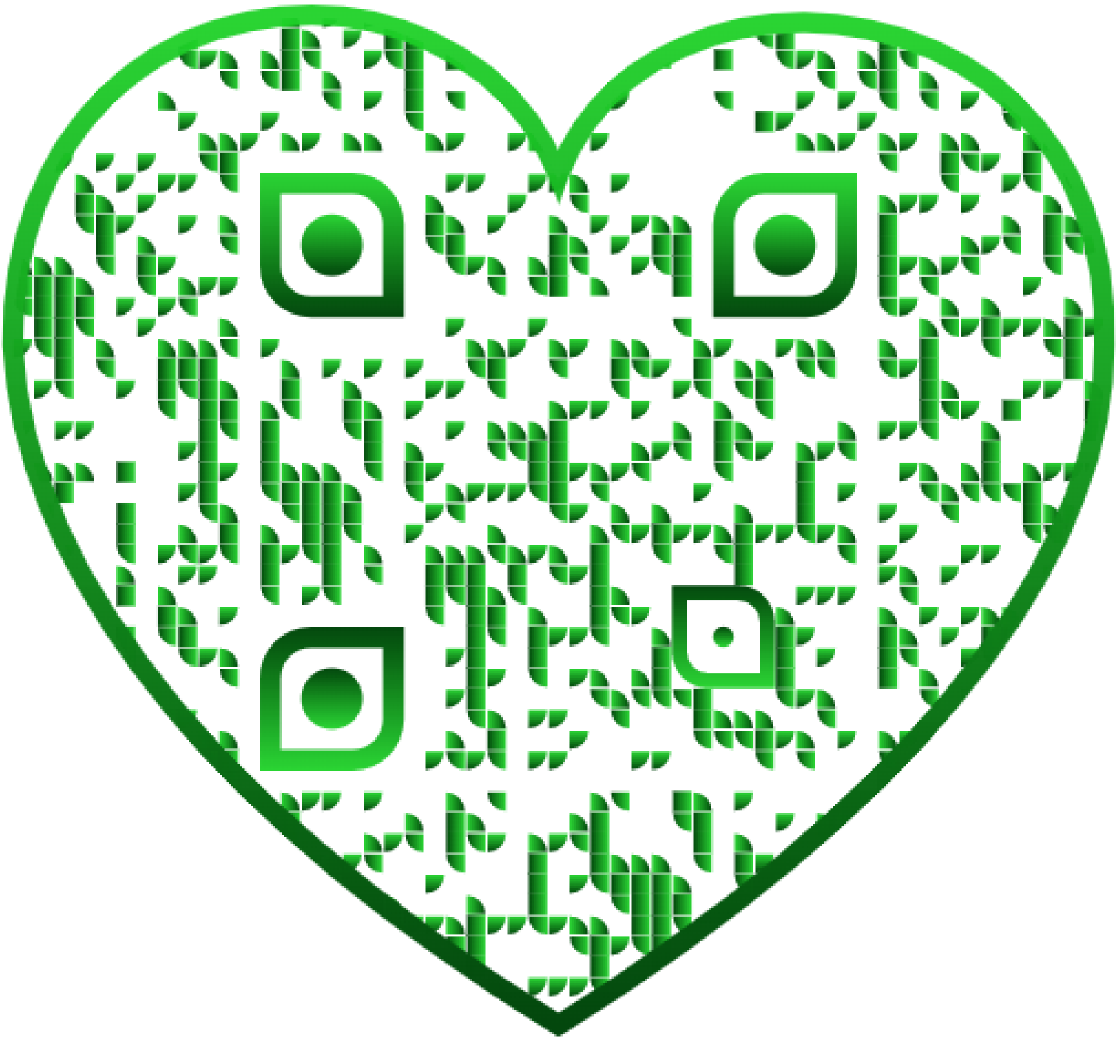

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MAY 17, 2025 • BILLBOARD.COM

# J-HOPE

**FROM BTS TO SOLO STADIUM STARDOM**

+

**40 UNDER 40**

**21 UNDER 21**

**GLOBAL POWER PLAYERS**

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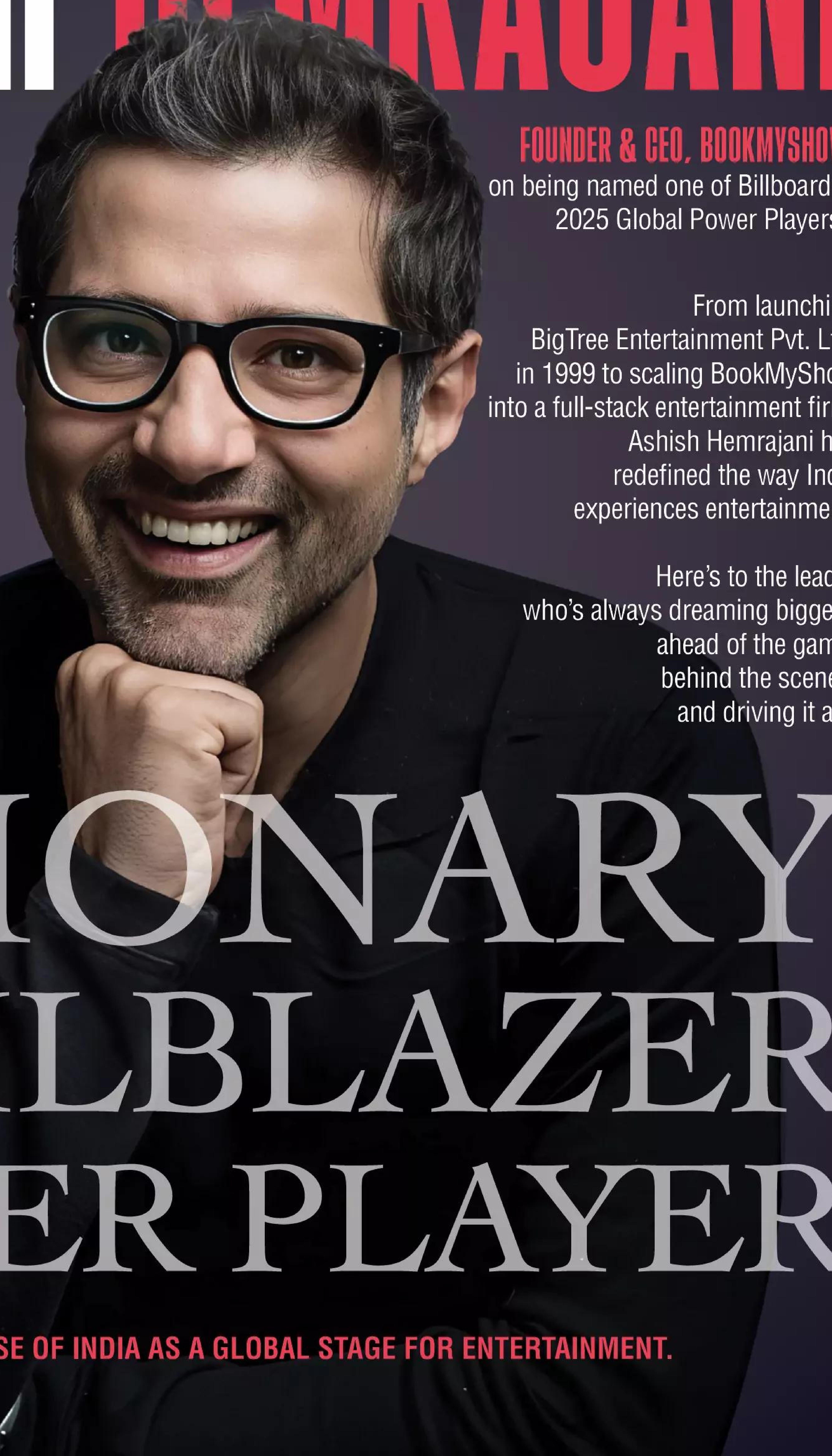
ASHISH HEMRAJANI



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# 40 UNDER 40

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HONOREES

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

UNIVERSAL

UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

# contents

MAY 17, 2025
VOLUME 137
NO. 7

**ON THE COVERS**
Tems photographed by Zoe McConnell on April 1 in London.

J-hope photographed by Julian Dakdouk on April 7 in Los Angeles. Louis Vuitton jacket, pants and belt.

**TO OUR READERS**
*Billboard* will publish its next issue on May 31. For 24/7 music coverage, go to billboard.com.

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### SHE'S A VIBE
As Nigerian artist **Tems** makes history and climbs the charts, she's contending with the grind and globe-trotting lifestyle that requires — and staying true to her own voice.

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### A NEW HOPE
With his groundbreaking solo tour and new singles, **j-hope** is forging a deeper connection with fans, expanding his own path beyond BTS and looking toward even bigger milestones ahead.

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**Top Dawg Entertainment** president **Anthony "Moosa" Tiffith** leads *Billboard*'s annual celebration of the music industry's next generation of label pros, managers and other young executives.

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Spanish-language albums are Nos. 1 and 2 on the Billboard 200 simultaneously for the first time thanks to **Bad Bunny**'s *DeBÍ TiRAR MáS FOToS* and **Fuerza Regida**'s *111XPANTIA*.

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**25**

With at least 10 major artists changing managers so far this year, some in the field say it's time to reassess their relationship with talent.

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*Billboard*'s annual list highlighting the next generation of rising artists leans lighter on pop than in previous years, with a handful of talent rooted in country music — plus, the first dancehall act to make it onto the list.

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How singer-songwriter **Role Model**'s fans (and some famous friends) helped make "Sally, When the Wine Runs Out" a hit.

From left: Megan, Sophia, Lara, Manon, Daniela and Yoonchae of KATSEYE photographed by Austin Hargrave on Oct. 29, 2024, in Los Angeles.

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BILLBOARD MAGAZINE, Vol. 137 Issue 7 (ISSN 0008-2510; USPS 056-100). Billboard magazine is published monthly with one issue in February, April, July, September and November; and two issues in January, March, May, June, August, October and December; a total of 19 issues, by PMC, 475 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10017. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send all UAA to CFS. (See DMM 507.1.5.2.) NON-POSTAL AND MILITARY FACILITIES: Send address corrections to Billboard, P.O. Box 37943, Boone, IA 50037. Under Canadian Publication Mail Agreement No. 414505040, return undeliverable Canadian addresses to MSI, P.O. Box 2800, Mississauga, ON L4T0A8. For subscription information, call 212-832-4053 (U.S.) or 845-367-3072 (international) or email customerservice@billboard.com. For any other information, call 212-493-4100.

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# 40 UNDER 40

## HONOREE

### SABRINA
### SARMIENTO

TALENT DIRECTOR, GOLDENVOICE

GOLDENVOICE

¡ERES UN DURO!

CONGRATULATIONS ALEJANDRO PABON – BILLBOARD'S 40 UNDER 40.
WE'RE SO PROUD OF YOU. ALL OUR LOVE & RESPECT, THE MOVE CONCERTS FAMILY.

MOVE CONCERTS

# charts

DATA FOR WEEK OF 5.17.2025

FUERZA REGIDA: COURTESY OF STREET MOB RECORDS. BAD BUNNY: STILLZ.

## Bad Bunny, Fuerza Regida Make Latin Music History Atop The Billboard 200

### BILLBOARD 200

**1**

***DeBÍ TiRAR MáS FOToS***

Bad Bunny

| LAST WEEK | PEAK POSITION | WEEKS ON CHART |
|---|---|---|
| 7 | 1 | 18 |

**IT'S A HISTORIC WEEK** for Latin music on the Billboard 200. For the first time in the chart's 69-year history, Spanish-language albums rank at No. 1 and No. 2 simultaneously.

*DeBÍ TiRAR MáS FOToS* by Bad Bunny jumps 7-1 following its vinyl release to collect a fourth week atop the list. At No. 2, band Fuerza Regida achieves its highest-charting album ever, and its first top 10, with the arrival of the group's new studio set, *111XPANTIA*.

Fuerza Regida also earns both the highest-charting Spanish-language album by a duo or group (surpassing the No. 4 peak of Mana's *Amar Es Combatir* in 2006) and for a regional Mexican music release (besting the No. 3 high of Peso Pluma's *Génesis* in 2023).

In the tracking week ending May 8, *DeBÍ TiRAR MáS FOToS* earned 84,500 equivalent album units in the United States (up 123%), according to Luminate, with 48,000 of that sum in vinyl purchases — sold exclusively through Bad Bunny's official webstore. The latter figure marks the largest sales week for a Latin album on vinyl since Luminate began tracking sales in 1991.

*111XPANTIA* also debuts at No. 2 on Top Latin Albums (the act's ninth top 10) and No. 1 on Top Regional Mexican Albums (its sixth leader).

The release continues Fuerza Regida's hot streak on the *Billboard* charts. The band made history on the year-end rankings in 2023 when it became the top duo/group among all genres — the first time an act that primarily records in Spanish achieved the feat — then repeated as top duo/group on the 2024 year-end recap.

—KEITH CAULFIELD

# Hot 100

| 2 WKS. AGO | LAST WEEK | THIS WEEK | Title<br>PRODUCER (SONGWRITER) | Artist<br>IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL | PEAK POS. | WKS. ON CHART |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | 1 | **#1 for 12 WEEKS**<br>**Luther**<br>SOUNWAVE,J.M.ANTONOFF,ROSELILAH,M-TECH,SCOTT BRIDGEWAY,K.WASHINGTON (K.L.DUCKWORTH,S.I.ROWE,A.BOGGS,S.J.DEW,M.A.SPEARS,J.M.ANTONOFF,R.L.BACHA,M.BERNARD, K.WASHINGTON,R.M.AKERS JR,M.GAYE) | **Kendrick Lamar & SZA**<br>PGLANG/INTERSCOPE/ICLG | 1 | 24 |
| ③ | ② | ② | **Ordinary**<br>A.YARON (A.WARREN,A.YARON,C.SHAPIRO,MAGS DUVAL) | **Alex Warren**<br>ATLANTIC | 2 | 13 |
| 2 | 3 | 3 | **Die With A Smile**<br>BRUNO MARS,D'MILE,LADY GAGA,ANDREW WATT (BRUNO MARS,S.G.GERMANOTTA,D.EMILE II, J.E.FAUNTLEROY II,A.WOTMAN) | **Lady Gaga & Bruno Mars**<br>STREAMLINE/INTERSCOPE/ATLANTIC/ICLG | 1 | 38 |
| 5 | ⑤ | 4 | **A Bar Song (Tipsy)**<br>S.COOK,N.SASTRY (C.O.CHIBUEZE,S.C.COOK,N.SASTRY,J.JONES,J.A.KENT,M.A.WILLIAMS) | **Shaboozey**<br>AMERICAN DOGWOOD/EMPIRE/MAGNOLIA MUSIC | 1 | 56 |
| 4 | ④ | 5 | **Nokia**<br>ELKAN (A.GRAHAM) | **Drake**<br>OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC/SANTA ANNA | 2 | 12 |
| 6 | 6 | 6 | **Pink Pony Club**<br>D.NIGRO (D.L.NIGRO,K.R.AMSTUTZ) | **Chappell Roan**<br>KRA/AMUSEMENT/ISLAND/REPUBLIC | 4 | 47 |
| 9 | 7 | 7 | **Lose Control**<br>INFAMOUS,AMMO,J.BUNETTA (J.E.COLEMAN,J.C.BUNETTA,M.RODRIGUEZ-DIAZ,MIKKY EKKO,J.C.DIMSDALE) | **Teddy Swims**<br>SWIMS INT./WARNER | 1 | 90 |
| 10 | 9 | 8 | **Beautiful Things**<br>E.BLAIR (B.BOONE,E.BLAIR,J.L.LARSEN) | **Benson Boone**<br>NIGHT STREET/WARNER | 2 | 67 |
| ⑫ | ⑩ | ⑨ | **AIR**<br>**Anxiety**<br>DOECHII (J.J.M.HICKMON,W.DE BACKER,L.F.BONFA) | **Doechii**<br>TOP DAWG/CAPITOL/ICLG | 9 | 9 |
| ⑦ | 8 | 10 | **I'm The Problem**<br>J.MOI,CHARLIE HANDSOME (M.C.WALLEN,G.W.BLOCK,J.MCLAUGHLIN,E.K.SMITH,CHARLIE HANDSOME) | **Morgan Wallen**<br>MERCURY/BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC | 2 | 14 |
| 13 | 12 | 11 | **Birds Of A Feather**<br>FINNEAS (B.E.O'CONNELL,F.B.O'CONNELL) | **Billie Eilish**<br>DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE/ICLG | 2 | 51 |
| 11 | 11 | 12 | **All The Way**<br>BANDPLAY,CHARLEY COOKS (X.LANDUM,C.N.FORSBERG III,K.O'BRIEN GAINES,B.JOHNSON,K.K.JOHNSON, J.JOHNSON) | **BigXthaPlug Featuring Bailey Zimmerman**<br>BIGXTHAPLUG/ATLANTIC/UNITEDMASTERS | 4 | 5 |
| 18 | 15 | ⑬ | **Mutt**<br>L.THOMAS,FAXXONLY,P.L.JOHNSON (L.G.THOMAS III,R.FAIRFAX III,L.A.CAMEJO,P.L.JOHNSON) | **Leon Thomas**<br>EZMNY/MOTOWN/ICLG | 13 | 14 |
| 15 | 14 | 14 | **I Had Some Help**<br>L.BELL,CHARLIE HANDSOME,HOSKINS (A.R.POST,M.C.WALLEN,L.B.BELL,CHARLIE HANDSOME,E.K.SMITH, J.J.HOSKINS,C.P.WALTERS,A.G.GORLEY) | **Post Malone Featuring Morgan Wallen**<br>MERCURY/BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC | 1 | 52 |
| ㉟ | ⑱ | ⑮ | **Blue Strips**<br>BEKON,S.GHERMAN,T.MEHLENBACHER (J.MURPH,L.J.VELTZ,D.TANNENBAUM,S.A.GHEMAN, T.R.MEHLENBACHER) | **Jessie Murph**<br>COLUMBIA | 15 | 4 |
| ⑰ | 17 | 16 | **Love Somebody**<br>J.MOI,CHARLIE HANDSOME (M.C.WALLEN,J.BYRON,A.G.GORLEY,J.K.HINDLIN,E.LOELV, CHARLIE HANDSOME,N.J.GALE,M.SORBARA,S.C.FRANK,S.F.R.MASTROIANNI,Y.GRUZMAN) | **Morgan Wallen**<br>MERCURY/BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC | 1 | 29 |
| 14 | 13 | 17 | **Just In Case**<br>J.MOI,CHARLIE HANDSOME (M.C.WALLEN,A.W.BAK,J.BYRON,J.K.HINDLIN,B.PENDERGRASS, J.P.THOMPSON,CHARLIE HANDSOME,E.K.SMITH) | **Morgan Wallen**<br>MERCURY/BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC | 4 | 7 |
| ㉒ | ㉑ | ⑱ | **Messy**<br>SOLOMONOPHONIC,MANUKA,MONSUNE,C.LANG (L.E.M.YOUNG,C.L.DICKINSON) | **Lola Young**<br>DAY ONE/ISLAND/REPUBLIC | 14 | 23 |
| 19 | 19 | 19 | **Espresso**<br>J.BUNETTA (S.A.CARPENTER,J.C.BUNETTA,A.R.ALLEN,S.N.JONES) | **Sabrina Carpenter**<br>ISLAND/REPUBLIC | 3 | 56 |
| 16 | 20 | 20 | **APT.**<br>BRUNO MARS,CIRKUT,O.FEDI,R.CHAHAYED (R.PARK,A.R.ALLEN,C.B.BROWN,R.CHAHAYED,O.FEDI, P.M.LAWRENCE II,BRUNO MARS,T.M.THOMAS,H.R.WALTER,M.D.CHAPMAN,N.CHINN) | **ROSE & Bruno Mars**<br>THE BLACK LABEL/ATLANTIC | 3 | 29 |

**Go to the Chart Beat section of billboard.com for complete charts coverage.**

The 30-year-old Houston native's first Hot 100 entry as a solo artist also holds at a No. 2 high on Hot Christian Songs.

NOAH HAYDEN

**HOT 100**

## 61

## "Your Way's Better"

Forrest Frank

**You released "Your Way's Better" in October, but a viral TikTok trend this year boosted the track.**
It was my 12th- or 13th-highest streaming song at a daily rate — it was not making a big splash. There's a couple, David Myers and Bridgette [Nicole], and they post a new dance almost every day to different songs, and it was one they did [in February]. What's interesting is that I was taking a social media break — I had posted maybe three times in a four-month period. At first, I didn't really engage with it, but then I saw a significant jump in my streams. I'm seeing these kids doing the dance. It feels like it's across the whole world.

**Your new album, *Child of God II*, arrived May 9, just six months after the first installment's deluxe edition. Why drop another full album so soon?**
I love pushing the boundaries. With *Child of God*, I had a song with Connor Price called "Up!" that splashed, and two weeks later, we released "Good Day," which became the next biggest one — and we kept dropping songs every two weeks because that's the pace I was writing music. Rather than hold back music for months, why not see what happens? My time and moment is finite to a degree, so if I'm excited about these songs and the fans are excited, why would I hold stuff back?

**With Brandon Lake and Jelly Roll's "Hard Fought Hallelujah" also on the Hot 100, what's your take on the surge in Christian music's popularity?**
I think it's just the people. Yes, it's the artists who are expressing their genuine love for God, but also, it's the consumers that are supporting it and championing it. With my tour, there's this family thing going on: We didn't expect for families to come to the show, but "Your Way's Better" has become the music for the car ride, the music on the way to school. It was like an invisible market. I knew that there was kind of a starving family market, but here it is. —JESSICA NICHOLSON

## HOT 100 FIRST-TIMERS

Artists who have recently made their initial appearances on the chart

| ARTIST | SONG | DEBUT POSITION | DEBUT DATE |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Forrest Frank** | "Your Way's Better" | 72 | May 3 |
| **PLUTO & YKNIECE** | "Whim Whamiee" | 92 | May 3 |
| **Hudson Westbrook** | "House Again" | 98 | May 3 |
| **Chuckyy** | "My World" | 79 | May 10 |
| **KATSEYE** | "Gnarly" | 92 | May 17 |

AIRPLAY, SALES AND STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE
BILLBOARD HOT 100: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR CURRENT SONGS ACROSS ALL GENRES, RANKED BY STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA BY ONLINE MUSIC SOURCES TRACKED BY LUMINATE, RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE AND SALES DATA AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2025 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

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**40 UNDER 40**

OUTBACK PRESENTS

Congratulations

# ANDREW FARWELL

## BILLBOARD 200

### 8

Glockaveli
KEY GLOCK

**Key Glock**
*Glockaveli*

The rapper's first release with Republic lands him a fourth career top 10, earning 34,500 equivalent album units in the United States in its opening week (ending May 8), according to Luminate.

### 13

**Lady Gaga**
*MAYHEM*

After nine weeks, the album has yet to leave the top 15. Her last nonsoundtrack studio set to spend as many weeks in the region following its debut was 2011's *Born This Way*, which spent its first 11 weeks in the top 15.

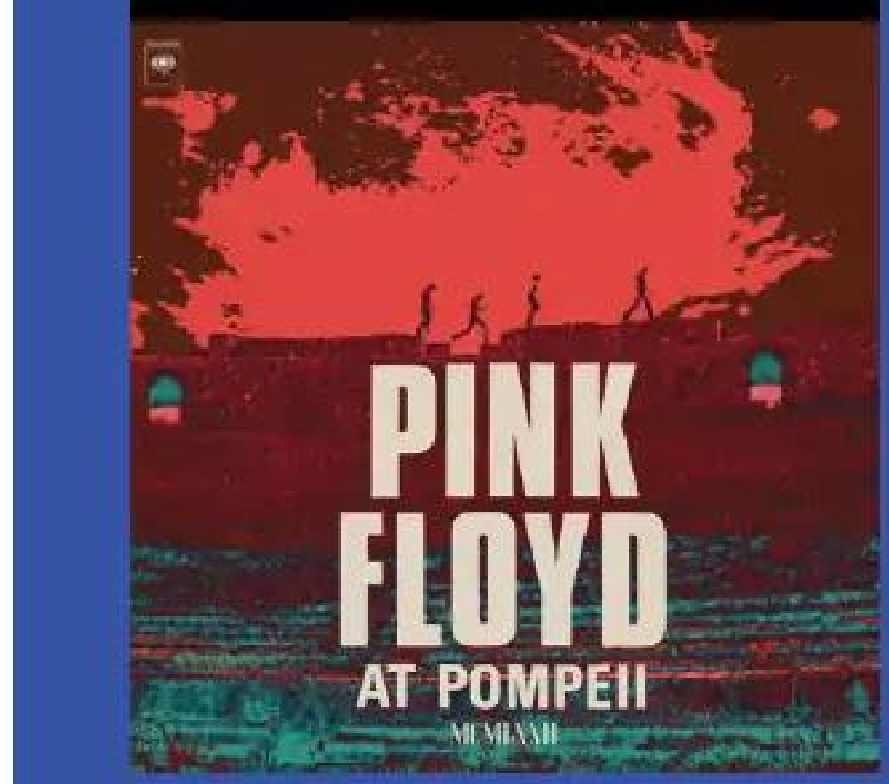
### 131

**DDG**
*Blame the Chat*

He nets his third charting release on the Billboard 200 (11,000 equivalent album units). *Blame the Chat* also enters at No. 41 on Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums.

### 28

**Pink Floyd**
*Pink Floyd at Pompeii: MCMLXXII*



Pink Floyd claims its 15th top 40-charting album on the Billboard 200 — and 30th entry overall — with the archival live set *Pink Floyd at Pompeii: MCMLXXII*, debuting at No. 28. The album is the audio companion to a concert film that was recorded in 1971 and briefly released the following year. While the film has been issued in various forms over the years, its audio has never been released as a stand-alone album until now.

The digitally remastered and remixed set contains the eight performances from the film and two bonus tracks. In total, it earned 21,000 equivalent album units in the United States in the week ending May 8, according to Luminate, with 20,000 of that sum in traditional album sales (digital download, double vinyl and a two-CD set combined). The set also starts at No. 3 on Top Album Sales, No. 2 on Vinyl Albums (12,500 sold) and No. 1 on Indie Store Album Sales.

—KEITH CAULFIELD

## Billboard 200

| 2 WKS. AGO | LAST WEEK | THIS WEEK | Artist<br>IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL | Title | PEAK POS. | WKS. ON CHART |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | 7 | ① | **#1 for 4 WEEKS** **SAL**<br>**Bad Bunny**<br>RIMAS | Debi Tirar Mas Fotos | 1 | 18 |
| HOT SHOT DEBUT | | ② | **Fuerza Regida**<br>STREET MOB/RANCHO HUMILDE/SONY MUSIC LATIN | 111XPANTIA | 2 | 1 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | **SZA**<br>TOP DAWG/RCA | SOS | 1 | 126 |
| ③ | 4 | 4 | **Morgan Wallen**<br>BIG LOUD/MERCURY/REPUBLIC | One Thing At A Time | 1 | 114 |
| 2 | 3 | 5 | **Kendrick Lamar**<br>PGLANG/INTERSCOPE/ICLG | GNX | 1 | 24 |
| 4 | 5 | 6 | **Sabrina Carpenter**<br>ISLAND/REPUBLIC | Short n' Sweet | 1 | 37 |
| 5 | 6 | 7 | **PARTYNEXTDOOR & Drake**<br>OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC/SANTA ANNA | $ome $exy $ongs 4 U | 1 | 12 |
| NEW | | ⑧ | **Key Glock**<br>PAPER ROUTE EMPIRE/REPUBLIC | Glockaveli | 8 | 1 |
| ⑨ | 10 | 9 | **Morgan Wallen**<br>BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC | Dangerous: The Double Album | 1 | 226 |
| 45 | ⑧ | 10 | **Shaboozey**<br>AMERICAN DOGWOOD/EMPIRE | Where I've Been, Isn't Where I'm Going | 5 | 49 |
| 14 | 12 | 11 | **Billie Eilish**<br>DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE/ICLG | Hit Me Hard And Soft | 2 | 51 |
| 7 | 9 | 12 | **Playboi Carti**<br>AWGE/INTERSCOPE/ICLG | MUSIC | 1 | 8 |
| 8 | 11 | 13 | **Lady Gaga**<br>STREAMLINE/INTERSCOPE/ICLG | MAYHEM | 1 | 9 |
| 26 | 28 | ⑭ | **PS**<br>**Post Malone**<br>MERCURY/REPUBLIC | The Diamond Collection | 11 | 76 |
| 12 | 14 | 15 | **Chappell Roan**<br>KRA/AMUSEMENT/ISLAND/REPUBLIC | The Rise And Fall Of A Midwest Princess | 2 | 59 |
| 13 | 16 | 16 | **Tate McRae**<br>RCA | So Close To What | 1 | 11 |
| ⑪ | 17 | 17 | **Taylor Swift**<br>REPUBLIC | The Tortured Poets Department | 1 | 55 |
| ⑯ | 18 | 18 | **Noah Kahan**<br>MERCURY/REPUBLIC | Stick Season | 2 | 128 |
| ⑰ | ⑲ | 19 | **Alex Warren**<br>ATLANTIC/AG | You'll Be Alright, Kid (Chapter 1) | 17 | 24 |
| 15 | 20 | 20 | **Ariana Grande**<br>REPUBLIC | Eternal Sunshine | 1 | 61 |

SALES AND STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

BILLBOARD 200: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR ALBUMS, BASED ON MULTIMETRIC CONSUMPTION, BLENDING TRADITIONAL ALBUM SALES, STREAMING-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS AND TRACK-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS, AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2025 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

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## PRESIDENT OF EUROPE

Billboard 2025 Global Power Players List

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LEGENDS

JIMMY FONTAINE

**GLOBAL 200**

# 1

**"Ordinary"**
Alex Warren

**ALEX WARREN'S** "Ordinary" spends a second week at No. 1 on the Billboard Global 200 chart. The singer-songwriter's first leader on the list drew 65.9 million official streams and sold 11,000 worldwide May 2-8, according to Luminate. The track by the Carlsbad, Calif., native became a viral hit, boosted by his performance of it in March on Netflix's *Love Is Blind*. It has since topped 12 of *Billboard*'s Hits of the World charts, spent eight weeks atop the Official U.K. Singles Chart and reached No. 2 on the U.S.-based Billboard Hot 100, where it holds for a second week.

Ravyn Lenae's "Love Me Not" leaps 30-19 on the Global 200, up 18% to 29.5 million streams worldwide. It also bounds 41-23 on Streaming Songs (10.2 million U.S. streams, up 17%) while climbing 38-31 on Rhythmic Airplay and debuting at No. 33 on Mainstream Top 40.

Sombr is scaling the Global 200 with two breakthrough tracks: "Back to Friends" (33-24) and "Undressed" (44-25). The artist born Shane Boose wrote both songs, producing the former on his own and co-producing the latter with veteran producer/A&R executive Tony Berg (who has recently worked with boygenius and MUNA's Katie Gavin).

Also in the Global 200's top 40, Maroon 5 and Lisa's "Priceless" debuts at No. 40 with 25.5 million streams and 7,000 sold worldwide in its first week. The song also soars in at Nos. 17 and 26 on the Adult Top 40 and Mainstream Top 40 airplay charts, respectively. The band boasts a record 15 No. 1s on Adult Top 40, and on Mainstream Top 40, its 11 leaders are the most among groups.

—GARY TRUST

## Global 200

| 2 WKS. AGO | LAST WEEK | THIS WEEK | Title | Artist | PEAK POS. | WKS. ON CHART |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | ① | 1 | **#1 for 2 WEEKS**<br>Ordinary | Alex Warren | 1 | 13 |
| 1 | 2 | 2 | Die With A Smile | Lady Gaga & Bruno Mars | 1 | 38 |
| 3 | 3 | 3 | APT. | ROSE & Bruno Mars | 1 | 29 |
| 4 | 4 | 4 | Birds Of A Feather | Billie Eilish | 1 | 51 |
| 5 | 5 | 5 | Beautiful Things | Benson Boone | 1 | 68 |
| 6 | 6 | 6 | like JENNIE | JENNIE | 5 | 9 |
| 9 | 13 | ⑦ | Abracadabra | Lady Gaga | 5 | 14 |
| 7 | 7 | 8 | Luther | Kendrick Lamar & SZA | 3 | 24 |
| 10 | 9 | 9 | Lose Control | Teddy Swims | 4 | 86 |
| ⑲ | ⑩ | 10 | Show Me Love | WizTheMc | 10 | 9 |
| 8 | 8 | 11 | Anxiety | Doechii | 3 | 9 |
| 16 | ⑭ | 12 | La Plena (W Sound 05) | W Sound, Beele & Ovy On The Drums | 12 | 10 |
| 11 | 12 | 13 | Messy | Lola Young | 5 | 23 |
| 12 | 11 | 14 | That's So True | Gracie Abrams | 4 | 29 |
| 14 | 15 | 15 | Espresso | Sabrina Carpenter | 1 | 56 |
| 18 | 20 | ⑯ | DTMF | Bad Bunny | 1 | 18 |
| 13 | 16 | 17 | Nokia | Drake | 8 | 12 |
| 15 | 17 | 18 | Not Like Us | Kendrick Lamar | 1 | 53 |
| ㊹ | ㉚ | ⑲ | Love Me Not | Ravyn Lenae | 19 | 7 |
| 21 | 21 | 20 | Wildflower | Billie Eilish | 11 | 51 |

STREAMING AND SALES DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

BILLBOARD GLOBAL 200: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR SONGS BASED ON STREAMING AND SALES ACTIVITY FROM OVER 200 TERRITORIES AROUND THE WORLD — INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES — AS TRACKED BY LUMINATE. THE RANKING IS BASED ON A WEIGHTED FORMULA INCORPORATING OFFICIAL-ONLY STREAMS ON BOTH SUBSCRIPTION AND AD-SUPPORTED TIERS OF LEADING AUDIO AND VIDEO MUSIC SERVICES, PLUS DOWNLOAD SALES FROM TOP MUSIC RETAILERS ACROSS THE GLOBE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2025 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

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**ARTIST 100**

**22**

**ERIC CHURCH**

WEEKS ON CHART

**200**

Church earns his 11th top 10 on Top Country Albums as his new eight-song set, *Evangeline vs. The Machine*, enters at No. 5. Released May 2, it earned 20,000 equivalent album units in its opening week, with 13,000 in album sales, according to Luminate. He notches his first entry on the chart since *Soul* started at its No. 2 high in May 2021. —JIM ASKER

NO. 61

## Car Seat Headrest Gets Comfy

Car Seat Headrest makes its first appearance on the Billboard Artist 100, debuting at No. 61 thanks to the band's 13th studio album, *The Scholars*. The set arrives at No. 8 on the Top Album Sales chart with 6,000 in sales. Of that sum, 4,000 are from vinyl, as it also starts at No. 8 on Vinyl Albums. *The Scholars* marks Car Seat Headrest's fifth and highest-charting release on Top Album Sales, surpassing *Making a Door Less Open* (No. 10 in 2020). Fronted by Will Toledo, the group formed in 2010 and made its *Billboard* chart debut in 2015. —KEVIN RUTHERFORD

NO. 71

## 'Burning' Hot Hit

Mariah the Scientist scores her first top 40 hit on the Billboard Hot 100 as "Burning Blue" launches at No. 25 (13.6 million first-week streams). The Atlanta native previously posted two entries on the chart, reaching a No. 70 high in January 2024 with "Dark Days" (with 21 Savage). "Burning Blue" concurrently starts as Mariah the Scientist's first top 10 on Hot R&B Songs (No. 3), Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs (No. 7) and the all-genre Streaming Songs chart (No. 9). Of her forthcoming fourth album, she told *Billboard* in March that it "has taken so many nights to put together — but it's done." —GARY TRUST

# Artist 100

| 2 WKS. AGO | LAST WEEK | THIS WEEK | Artist | IMPRINT/LABEL | PEAK POS. | WKS. ON CHART |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 1 | #1 for 19 WEEKS<br>**Morgan Wallen** | BIG LOUD/MERCURY/REPUBLIC | 1 | 322 |
| 24 | 27 | ② | **Bad Bunny** | RIMAS | 1 | 346 |
| 91 | 95 | ③ | **Fuerza Regida** | STREET MOB/RANCHO HUMILDE/SONY MUSIC LATIN | 3 | 79 |
| 2 | 3 | 4 | **Kendrick Lamar** | PGLANG/INTERSCOPE/ICLG | 1 | 488 |
| 4 | 4 | 5 | **SZA** | TOP DAWG/RCA | 1 | 297 |
| 3 | 5 | 6 | **Sabrina Carpenter** | ISLAND/REPUBLIC | 1 | 75 |
| 15 | 7 | 7 | **Benson Boone** | NIGHT STREET/WARNER | 6 | 68 |
| 6 | 6 | 8 | **Chappell Roan** | KRA/AMUSEMENT/ISLAND/REPUBLIC | 1 | 56 |
| 7 | 10 | 9 | **Lady Gaga** | STREAMLINE/INTERSCOPE/ICLG | 1 | 318 |
| 11 | 13 | 10 | **Drake** | OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC | 1 | 565 |
| 8 | 9 | 11 | **Teddy Swims** | SWIMS INT./WARNER | 3 | 87 |
| 9 | 8 | 12 | **Billie Eilish** | DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE/ICLG | 1 | 342 |
| 16 | 16 | 13 | **Luke Combs** | RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE/SMN | 1 | 427 |
| (76) | 79 | ⑭ | **Pink Floyd** | PINK FLOYD/COLUMBIA | 3 | 149 |
| 19 | 12 | 15 | **Shaboozey** | AMERICAN DOGWOOD/EMPIRE | 8 | 56 |
| 14 | 11 | 16 | **Jelly Roll** | BAILEE & BUDDY/STONEY CREEK/BMG/REPUBLIC | 1 | 147 |
| 12 | 14 | 17 | **The Weeknd** | XO/REPUBLIC | 1 | 513 |
| 13 | 20 | 18 | **Post Malone** | MERCURY/REPUBLIC | 1 | 463 |
| ⑤ | 15 | 19 | **Doechii** | TOP DAWG/CAPITOL | 5 | 26 |
| 10 | 17 | 20 | **Taylor Swift** | REPUBLIC | 1 | 563 |

CHURCH: ROBBY KLEIN. CAR SEAT HEADREST: CARLOS CRUZ. MARIAH THE SCIENTIST: ANGEL RIVERA.

AIRPLAY, SALES AND STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

BILLBOARD ARTIST 100: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR ARTISTS ACROSS ALL GENRES, RANKED BY ALBUM AND TRACK SALES AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE, RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE, STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA FROM ONLINE MUSIC SOURCES TRACKED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2025 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

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WARNER MUSIC GROUP

NO. 1

## Top 40 Gets 'Messy'

"Messy" by Lola Young (above) crowns the Mainstream Top 40 chart. The song tops a second individual-format radio ranking after leading Alternative Airplay for a week in April. "Messy" becomes just the sixth song by a solo woman in a lead role or a woman-fronted group to hit No. 1 on both charts, joining Billie Eilish's "Therefore I Am" (in 2021) and "bad guy" (2019), Lorde's "Royals" (2013), Evanescence's "Bring Me to Life" (featuring Paul McCoy, 2003) and Alanis Morissette's "Ironic" (1996).

Additionally, "Messy" is Young's introductory hit to reach a *Billboard* chart and becomes the first such song by a woman with lead billing to top both Mainstream Top 40 and Alternative Airplay since "Royals." Of the aforementioned songs, "Bring Me to Life," with lead vocals by Amy Lee, likewise became Evanescence's first charted *Billboard* hit.

Notably, two versions of "Messy" are scaling the Dance/Mix Show Airplay chart back-to-back: Young's original rendition at No. 21 and Łaszewo's cover at No. 22.

—GARY TRUST

## Mainstream Top 40

| LAST WEEK | THIS WEEK | Title<br>IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL | Artist | WKS. ON CHART |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | 1 | **#1 for 1 WEEK**<br>**Messy**<br>DAY ONE/ISLAND/REPUBLIC | Lola Young | 17 |
| 5 | 2 | **GG**<br>**Anxiety**<br>TOP DAWG/CAPITOL/ICLG | Doechii | 8 |
| 1 | 3 | **Luther**<br>PGLANG/INTERSCOPE/ICLG | Kendrick Lamar & SZA | 20 |
| 2 | 4 | **Pink Pony Club**<br>KRA/AMUSEMENT/ISLAND/REPUBLIC | Chappell Roan | 26 |
| 4 | 5 | **Die With A Smile**<br>STREAMLINE/ATLANTIC/INTERSCOPE/ICLG | Lady Gaga & Bruno Mars | 38 |
| 6 | 6 | **Sports Car**<br>RCA | Tate McRae | 15 |
| 7 | 7 | **Cry For Me**<br>XO/REPUBLIC | The Weeknd | 14 |
| 8 | 8 | **Bad Dreams**<br>SWIMS INT./WARNER | Teddy Swims | 19 |
| 10 | 9 | **Abracadabra**<br>STREAMLINE/INTERSCOPE/ICLG | Lady Gaga | 13 |
| 9 | 10 | **That's So True**<br>INTERSCOPE/ICLG | Gracie Abrams | 25 |

NO. 8

## Green Takes 'Worst Way' To Top 10

Riley Green's "Worst Way" becomes one of three new top 10s on Country Airplay. The track hops 11-8, up 10% to 16.6 million audience impressions May 2-8, according to Luminate. He banks his sixth top 10 and first since his duet with Ella Langley, "you look like you love me," which became his second chart-topper in December. Meanwhile, Green's solo-written "Worst Way" is the list's first top 10 by one writer since Cody Johnson's "Dirt Cheap," penned by Josh Phillips (No. 5 peak in August 2024). The last artist to reach the top 10 with a solo-written song was Chayce Beckham, who led for a week in April 2024 with "23."

Corey Kent and Langley each land a second Country Airplay top 10. The former's "This Heart" rises 12-9 (16.4 million, up 12%) and the latter's "Weren't for the Wind" gusts 13-10 (15.5 million, up 12%).

—JIM ASKER

## Country Airplay

| LAST WEEK | THIS WEEK | Title<br>IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL | Artist | WKS. ON CHART |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | **#1 for 4 WEEKS**<br>**I'm The Problem**<br>MERCURY/REPUBLIC/BIG LOUD | Morgan Wallen | 14 |
| 4 | 2 | **I Never Lie**<br>LEO33 | Zach Top | 30 |
| 3 | 3 | **Whiskey Drink**<br>MACON/BROKEN BOW | Jason Aldean | 41 |
| 8 | 4 | **Am I Okay?**<br>MEGAN MORONEY/COLUMBIA/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE | Megan Moroney | 38 |
| 6 | 5 | **Hometown Home**<br>BMG/GALAXY LABEL GROUP | LOCASH | 49 |
| 2 | 6 | **Texas**<br>TEN POINT/WHEELHOUSE | Blake Shelton | 25 |
| 9 | 7 | **Backseat Driver**<br>ZONE 4/RCA NASHVILLE | Kane Brown | 27 |
| 11 | 8 | **Worst Way**<br>NASHVILLE HARBOR | Riley Green | 22 |
| 12 | 9 | **This Heart**<br>COMBUSTION MASTERS/RCA NASHVILLE | Corey Kent | 46 |
| 13 | 10 | **Weren't For The Wind**<br>SAWGOD/COLUMBIA/TRIPLE TIGERS | Ella Langley | 19 |

YOUNG: EMMA MCINTYRE/GETTY IMAGES. GREEN: MATTHEW SIMMONS.

AIRPLAY DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

MAINSTREAM TOP 40 AIRPLAY: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR SONGS RANKED BY MAINSTREAM TOP 40 RADIO AIRPLAY DETECTIONS, AS MEASURED BY MEDIABASE AND PROVIDED BY LUMINATE. STATIONS ARE ELECTRONICALLY MONITORED 24 HOURS A DAY, SEVEN DAYS A WEEK. COUNTRY AIRPLAY: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR SONGS RANKED BY COUNTRY RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS, AS MEASURED BY MEDIABASE AND PROVIDED BY LUMINATE. STATIONS ARE ELECTRONICALLY MONITORED 24 HOURS A DAY, SEVEN DAYS A WEEK. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2025 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

MOLIY: ACEPXL. GROBAN: SAMI DRASIN.

NO. 1

# ‘Max’ Reigns Supreme

A new champion emerges on Billboard U.S. Afrobeats Songs as “Shake It to the Max (FLY)” by Shenseea, MOLIY, Skillibeng and Silent Addy (above, from left) becomes just the second song to top the list in 2025. “Max,” released in December with only MOLIY and Silent Addy before Skillibeng and Shenseea joined a remix in March, dethrones Tyla’s “Push 2 Start” after its 20-week domination. The new leader registered 2.9 million official U.S. streams in the May 2-8 tracking week, according to Luminate.

Elsewhere, “Max,” which was initially a viral hit, keeps growing at U.S. radio, jumping 33-26 in its third week on Rhythmic Airplay (up 48% in plays for the week) and debuting at No. 34 on Mainstream R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay (up 53%). Stateside gains mirror the song’s wide international appeal: It improves on both the Billboard Global 200 (136-111) and Billboard Global Excl. U.S. charts (95-81).

—TREVOR ANDERSON

## Billboard U.S. Afrobeats Songs

| LAST WEEK | THIS WEEK | Title | Artist | WKS. ON CHART |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 1 | **#1 for 1 WEEK**<br>**Shake It To The Max (FLY)** | **MOLIY, Silent Addy, Skillibeng & Shenseea** | 11 |
| 1 | 2 | **Push 2 Start** | **Tyla** | 30 |
| 3 | 3 | **Water** | **Tyla** | 89 |
| 4 | 4 | **Move** | **Adam Port, Stryv & Camila Cabello Feat. Malachiii** | 48 |
| 7 | 5 | **With You** | **Davido Featuring Omah Lay** | 3 |
| 5 | 6 | **Laho** | **Shallipopi** | 11 |
| 8 | 7 | **Offa Me** | **Davido Featuring Victoria Monet** | 3 |
| 9 | 8 | **Baby (Is It A Crime)** | **Rema** | 13 |
| 6 | 9 | **Gimme Dat** | **Ayra Starr & Wizkid** | 2 |
| 19 | 10 | **Kai!** | **Olamide & WizKid** | 2 |

NO. 1

# *Gems* Sparkles At No. 1

Josh Groban returns to the top of both the Classical Albums and Classical Crossover Albums charts as his first U.S. retrospective collection, *Gems*, debuts at No. 1 on the rankings. It’s his sixth leader on each list and first since *Awake Live* in 2008. (Groban charted six albums on both classical charts between 2002 and 2008, when his music leaned more classical before heading in a more pop-focused direction.)

The 18-song *Gems* contains nine tracks from his first three studio albums (his self-titled set, *Closer* and *Awake*, released between 2002 and 2006), all of which led both Classical Albums and Classical Crossover Albums. Among the cuts featured on *Gems* are seven hits on the Adult Contemporary airplay chart, including two No. 1s: “To Where You Are” and “You Raise Me Up.” Also among the collection are two previously unreleased tracks: “Be Alright” and “Open Hands.”

—KEITH CAULFIELD

## Classical Albums

| LAST WEEK | THIS WEEK | Artist<br>IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL | Title | WKS. ON CHART |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| NEW | 1 | **#1 for 1 WEEK**<br>**Josh Groban**<br>REPRISE/WARNER | **Gems** | 1 |
| 1 | 2 | **GG**<br>**Soundtrack**<br>33SANDFALL INTERACTIVE/LACED | **Clair Obscur: Expedition** | 2 |
| 2 | 3 | **Andrea Bocelli**<br>SUGAR/DECCA/VLG | **Duets: 30th Anniversary** | 28 |
| NEW | 4 | **Varujan Kojian / The Utah Symphony Orchestra**<br>VARESE SARABANDE/CRAFT/CONCORD | **John Williams: The Star Wars Trilogy** | 1 |
| 4 | 5 | **The Piano Guys**<br>MASTERWORKS/SONY MASTERWORKS | **The Piano Guys** | 316 |
| 3 | 6 | **Soundtrack**<br>DECCA/UME | **Pride & Prejudice** | 334 |
| 5 | 7 | **Max Richter**<br>DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON/UME | **Sleep** | 284 |
| RE-ENTRY | 8 | **Yiruma**<br>SONY MUSIC KOREA/LEGACY | **The Best: Reminiscent, 10th Anniversary** | 236 |
| 6 | 9 | **Chad Lawson**<br>DECCA/VLG | **Breathe** | 120 |
| 7 | 10 | **Ludovico**<br>DECCA/UME | **Einaudi Islands: Essential Einaudi** | 98 |

STREAMING AND SALES DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

BILLBOARD U.S. AFROBEATS SONGS: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR CURRENT AFROBEATS SONGS IN THE UNITED STATES BASED ON A WEIGHTED FORMULA INCORPORATING OFFICIAL STREAMS ON BOTH SUBSCRIPTION AND AD-SUPPORTED TIERS OF LEADING AUDIO AND VIDEO MUSIC SERVICES, PLUS DOWNLOAD SALES FROM TOP MUSIC RETAILERS, AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. CLASSICAL ALBUMS: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR CLASSICAL ALBUMS, BASED ON MULTIMETRIC CONSUMPTION, BLENDING TRADITIONAL ALBUM SALES, STREAMING-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS AND TRACK-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS, AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2025 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

# CONGRATULATIONS

## 2025 Billboard Global Power Players

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this movement,
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NCT DREAM WayV aespa RIIZE NCT WISH
naevis dearALICE Hearts2Hearts SMTR25

SM
ENTERTAINMENT

# market

PG. 26 BLUEGRASS BLOWS UP
PG. 28 PUBLISHERS QUARTERLY
PG. 30 PER SUNDIN ON POPHOUSE'S KISS PROJECT

MUSIC AND MONEY

From left: Roan, FINNEAS, Eilish, Lil Nas X, Cyrus and Role Model.

FINNEAS, EILISH: ALLEN J. SCHABEN/LOS ANGELES TIMES/GETTY IMAGES. ROAN: ERIKA GOLDRING/WIREIMAGE. LIL NAS X: LIONEL HAHN/GETTY IMAGES. CYRUS: MAYA DEHLIN SPACH/GETTY IMAGES. ROLE MODEL: ALBERTO E. RODRIGUEZ/WIREIMAGE.

## Management Musical Chairs:

# What's Driving This Year's Defections?

With at least 10 major artists changing representation so far this year, some in the field say it's time to reassess their relationship with talent

BY LYNDSEY HAVENS

**WHEN *BILLBOARD* REPORTED** on May 6 that Camila Cabello had split with her longtime manager, Roger Gold, it was the latest in a rash of at least 10 departures and signings that have taken place so far in the first half of the year.

Gigi Perez, known for her viral hit "Sailor Song," parted ways with Laffitte Management Group. The Chainsmokers and longtime manager Adam Alpert dissolved their management deal in January (although they remain on Alpert's Disruptor Records and partners in other ventures). Lil Nas X left Adam Leber's Rebel to sign with Crush Music for management. Janelle Lopez Genzink, founder and CEO of Volara Management, the firm behind superstar Sabrina Carpenter, signed longtime free agent HAIM, which The Azoff Company's Full Stop formerly represented. Noah Cyrus left TaP for Range Music. Best Friends lost Billie Eilish and her brother, FINNEAS, to Sandbox Entertainment's Jason Owen, and rising star Role Model departed as well. And in April, Chappell Roan's new management team — led by Foundations Music's Drew Simmons — was announced after she parted with State of the Art last November.

Artists swapping managers is hardly a rare occurrence. As one 20-plus-year veteran of artist management says, "Working with high-profile pop artists can be incredibly stressful, especially when things start to go wrong — it can feel like you're in a sinking ship and can't find where the water is coming in."

But with such an unusual number of transitions in such a short time, those in the profession see a number of factors at work and say managers increasingly need to protect themselves by revising the way they do business.

"Artists are quicker to move on," a longtime artist manager/record executive says. "And I do think that's just the nature of society today and this instant gratification culture. Artist empowerment is phenomenal, [but] maybe this is a *small* downside to it, that artists think they know everything."

The 20-year-plus veteran, who has represented some of the biggest acts of the mid-2000s, believes the biggest change is visibility, citing trade media sites like ROSTR — which tracks changes in representation — and increased scrutiny. "Social media has made it much easier for a manager to position themselves as a public figure, and some, Scooter [Braun] being a good example, understood

**Etsy** agreed to sell online musical instruments and equipment marketplace **Reverb** to **Creator Partners** and **Servco**.

**Goldstate Music** raised $500 million in financing to expand its music portfolio.

**Cumulus Media** was delisted from Nasdaq after its shares closed under $1 every day since November.

**SoundExchange** and the **National Association of Broadcasters** settled on new rates for 2026-30.

that world and navigated it in a really smart way. I remember watching it over time — it was such a different approach to using persona as a way to complement the business that you're trying to build.”

The longtime manager/label executive agrees that social media has altered the playing field. “We're constantly comparing and looking at how someone is doing better than us. Managers, writers, producers — we're all looking at it. I have producer clients that see other producers posting cuts and then they're [feeling] down. Artists do that as well, and I think the manager is typically the first to blame and the easiest to get out of a deal because we don't have the contracts that a label or a publisher has. Agents and lawyers do, too, but they get fired all the time and no one knows about it.”

> **“When society and consumer behavior changes and evolves, how quickly do industries reassess?”**
>
> —VETERAN ARTIST MANAGER

Given the recent spate of shake-ups, the veteran manager says his profession needs to consider a core question: “When society and consumer behavior changes and evolves, how quickly do industries reassess?”

Some contend that reassessment is happening right now, with one calling Eilish and FINNEAS' departure from Best Friends — where they had been since the beginning of their careers — “this natural tipping point of like, ‘Huh. Why?’ ”

While the superstar siblings' reasons for moving to Sandbox are unclear, one aspect of artist-management relationships currently under reevaluation is remuneration. Music managers receive a commission from all of an act's business deals. But the fast-changing field — and music industry at large — is why some sources believe more artists want to build “in-house teams like Taylor [Swift],” according to a manager of producers and songwriters. “They don't want to pay commissions. They want to structure it differently.” That said, such arrangements are typically reserved for music's upper echelon. “It makes more sense when you're at a certain level to carry that overhead,” the source says. “If you're playing arenas and stadiums, then that is probably something you should be thinking about. But at the same time, if you started your career with a manager and you're 10 years in, I think that's a rough time for you to be like, ‘Hey, by the way, I think you should switch to salary.’ ”

Which is why one source argues that “really good managers who do so much should have equity. The label, the rest of the team, it's all really driven by management. Fifteen percent [commission] is not [enough] to cover all the overhead and everything that you do for an artist and everything that the label doesn't do.” And the producer/songwriter manager insists sunset clauses, in which managers are entitled to continued pay for a set period after an artist fires them, are “crucial.”

It all adds up to a climate in which the veteran pop manager asks, “In a world where it is so easy for you to search out what other people are doing or how to do something [yourself], how manageable can a person be?” **b**

Strings performed at the 2025 MusiCares Persons of the Year benefit gala in Los Angeles in January.

MICHAEL BUCKNER FOR BILLBOARD

**GENRE REPORT**

# BILLY STRINGS BLOWS UP BLUEGRASS

The 32-year-old artist's contemporary take on the genre is filling arenas and boosting the popularity of other acts

**SUSTO FRONTMAN** Justin Osborne did not record bluegrass versions of his previously released indie-rock songs as a play to book more festival dates. But it didn't hurt. After moving to Asheville, N.C., and becoming inspired by the genre's rich roots there, the rechristened Susto Stringband's 2025 album with the local Holler Choir, *Volume 1*, opened up a lot of opportunities, Osborne says. “We started to get offers to play these string band- and bluegrass-oriented festivals that Susto never had a position in.”

Osborne is benefiting from a pivotal moment in bluegrass history. Thanks to arena-filling phenomenon Billy Strings and rising mainstream country stars Zach Top and Molly Tuttle, the genre is “going through an upward cycle,” says Ken White, executive director of the Nashville-based International Bluegrass Music Association.

“For a long time, artists did not want to get pigeonholed into bluegrass,” adds Craig Ferguson, president of Planet Bluegrass, whose long-running events include the Telluride Bluegrass Festival and RockyGrass. “Now a lot of artists are wanting to do their bluegrass thing, from Dierks Bentley to Sturgill Simpson.”

Invented by Bill Monroe in the 1930s, the soulful melding of high, lonesome harmonies; acoustic string instruments; and onstage picking circles has periodically pushed past its comfort zone at campfires and hullabaloos. “It happens every decade or so,” White says.

Strings, 32, currently dominates the genre. In October, his *Highway Prayers* topped *Billboard*'s Bluegrass Albums and Top Album Sales charts. According to Luminate, he had the most consumed bluegrass albums in 2023 (*Me / And / Dad*, 11.1 million streams and 49,000 sales) and 2024 (*Highway Prayers* and *Live, Vol. 1*, with a combined 37.9 million streams and 64,000 sales). His stardom has led to collaborations with Post Malone and Luke Combs; on his 2023 tour, he grossed $10.8 million and sold 174,000 tickets, according to Billboard Boxscore.

Ferguson suspects that evolving sound technology is a factor in Strings' rise to fame. He says that since the Telluride festival's debut in the late 1980s, it has struggled to balance the musicians' need to hear one another onstage with the need to amplify the music throughout the venue. Strings and his fellow players benefit from using in-ear monitors, which leads Ferguson to say, “I'm not sure Billy could do his thing without that technological shift.”

Bluegrass artists tend to make the bulk of their revenue through live performances. Brandon Mauldin, manager of The SteelDrivers — a 20-year-old bluegrass band that Chris Stapleton fronted early on — says the act derives 85% of its income from touring, 10% from merchandise and 5% from royalties. The group's reputation allows it to make a living on fewer than 100 dates per year. “They've learned to tour selectively and push in those markets they feel like they can grow,” Mauldin says.

Singer-songwriter Sierra Hull signed to Rounder Records in the early 2000s when she was 13 but released her latest album, *A Tip Toe High Wire*, independently, purchasing the albums directly from a vinyl manufacturer to avoid paying “an upcharge to the label.” She markets her music to her 151,000 Instagram followers and makes much of her revenue from live dates, including opening for Strings, Bob Dylan and Willie Nelson.

Strings also started at Rounder but signed with Reprise after the label's executive vp/A&R, Jeff Sosnow, says he spent a year “courting him.” Sosnow compares Strings to another Reprise artist — Neil Young — in the sense that Strings may wind up transcending bluegrass. “You never know what Neil's going to show up with, right?” he says. “I view Billy in that lens.” —**STEVE KNOPPER**

# Nearly $3 Billion in Total Royalties Distributed –

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**Create Music Group** acquired indie electronic labels **!K7** and **Monstercat.**

**Interscope Geffen A&M** relaunched the **Lost Highway** imprint and announced **Kacey Musgraves** as its first artist.

# SONY REGAINS TOP PUBLISHER SPOTS IN FIRST QUARTER

The song-catalog giant topped both the Hot 100 and Radio Airplay rankings after slipping behind Warner Chappell in fourth-quarter 2024

BY KRISTIN ROBINSON

**SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING** returned to No. 1 on the Hot 100 Songs and Top Radio Airplay charts in the first quarter, regaining ground it lost to Warner Chappell Music at the end of last year.

The publisher regained the top spot on Top Radio Airplay — which it had held for 14 consecutive quarters until the fourth quarter of 2024 — with 27.61% of the market and clinched No. 1 on Hot 100 Songs with 28.31%, thanks to its share of a whopping 73 songs on both charts, including the No. 1s on each: "Die With a Smile" by Lady Gaga and Bruno Mars on the former and "Luther" by Kendrick Lamar and SZA on the latter. Lamar also ranked as the quarter's top Hot 100 Songs writer.

Mars

Warner Chappell dropped to No. 2 (22.45%) on Top Radio Airplay and to No. 3 on Hot 100 Songs (20.52%) with stakes in 61 and 62 songs, respectively. The No. 1 Top Radio Airplay songwriter, Amy Allen, co-wrote eight of those tracks, including the Sabrina Carpenter hits "Espresso" and "Taste," as well as the Rosé and Bruno Mars smash, "APT."

Universal Music Publishing Group rose one position to No. 2 on Hot 100 Songs due to a dramatic quarter-to-quarter market-share surge from 19.92% to 25.04%. Its strong showing was fueled by Lamar, who wrote or co-wrote eight songs on that chart.

Kobalt and BMG remained steady at No. 4 and No. 5, respectively, on both rankings despite Hot 100 Songs market-share declines. Kobalt dropped from 10.89% to 8.23% quarter to quarter, and BMG fell from 4.67% to 3.64%. Each has a piece of "Die With a Smile," which helped maintain their positions as the top indie publishers in the rankings.

For the last three months of 2024, Pulse finished ninth on Top Radio Airplay and fell short of the Hot 100 Songs top 10. It has made significant gains since then, ranking at No. 6 on the former and at No. 8 on the latter, thanks to the continued success of Koe Wetzel's "High Road," which finished the first quarter at No. 13 on Top Radio Airplay and No. 32 on Hot 100 Songs. Pulse also benefited from shares of five other Top Radio Airplay hits in the first quarter and six more for Hot 100 Songs.

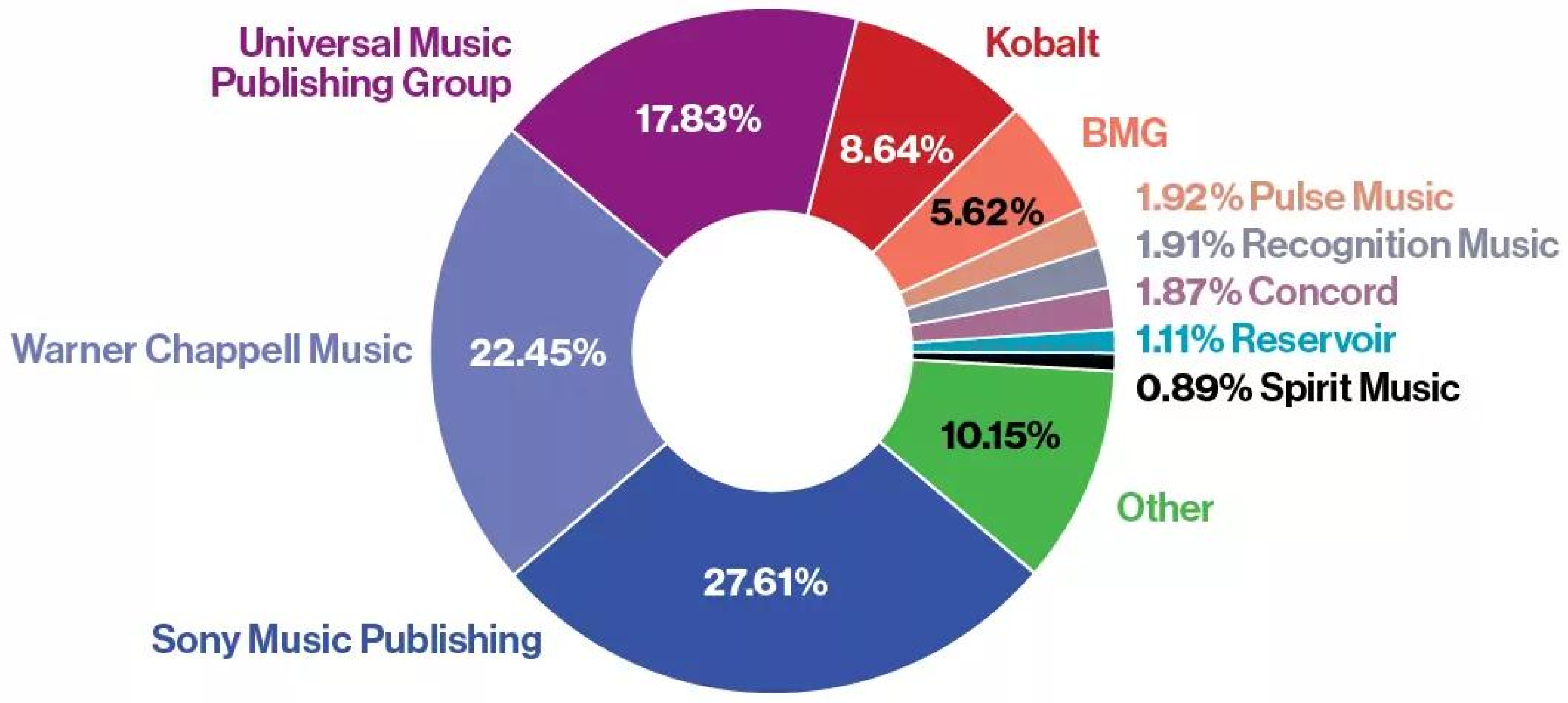
Recognition Music, previously known as Hipgnosis Songs Group, rose one position on Hot 100 Songs to No. 7 but fell one spot on Top Radio Airplay. Its shares of songs included "Espresso" and Teddy Swims' "Lose Control," both holdover hits from 2024.

First-timers on the rankings are Whooping Crane Music and Mothership Music, which took the ninth and 10th spots, respectively, on Hot 100 Songs. The former had a share in the No. 14 song, Lamar's "Squabble Up." The latter is the home of Latin alt-rock band The Marías, who, after years of building a fan base, have begun to break into the mainstream. This year, their song "No One Noticed" went viral and hit No. 34 on the Hot 100 in the first quarter. The act also appears on Selena Gomez and Benny Blanco's "Ojos Tristes." b

*Additional reporting by Ed Christman.*

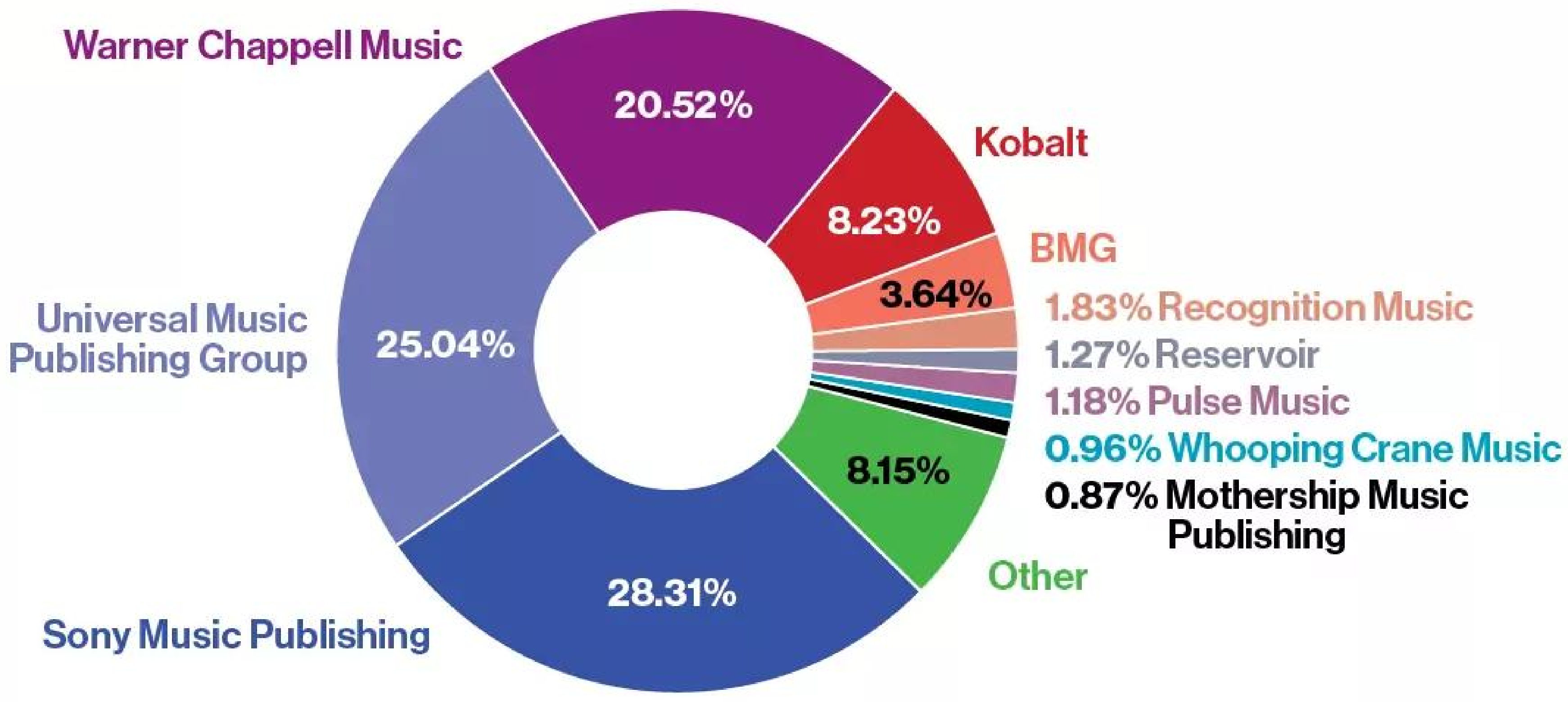
Rosé

## Top Radio Airplay: Publishers*



| Rank | Title | Artist | Imprint/Promotion Label |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | "Die With a Smile" | Lady Gaga & Bruno Mars | Streamline/Interscope/Atlantic/ICLG |
| 2 | "A Bar Song (Tipsy)" | Shaboozey | American Dogwood/EMPIRE/Magnolia Music |
| 3 | "Stargazing" | Myles Smith | It's OK To Feel/RCA |
| 4 | "APT." | Rosé & Bruno Mars | The Black Label/Atlantic |
| 5 | "That's So True" | Gracie Abrams | Interscope/ICLG |
| 6 | "Luther" | Kendrick Lamar & SZA | pgLang/Interscope/ICLG |
| 7 | "Love Somebody" | Morgan Wallen | Mercury/Big Loud/Republic |
| 8 | "Birds of a Feather" | Billie Eilish | Darkroom/Interscope/ICLG |
| 9 | "Espresso" | Sabrina Carpenter | Island/Republic |
| 10 | "Taste" | Sabrina Carpenter | Island/Republic |

## Hot 100 Songs: Publishers*



| Rank | Title | Artist | Imprint/Promotion Label |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | "Luther" | Kendrick Lamar & SZA | pgLang/Interscope/ICLG |
| 2 | "Die With a Smile" | Lady Gaga & Bruno Mars | Streamline/Interscope/Atlantic/ICLG |
| 3 | "A Bar Song (Tipsy)" | Shaboozey | American Dogwood/EMPIRE/Magnolia Music |
| 4 | "TV Off" | Kendrick Lamar featuring Lefty Gunplay | pgLang/Interscope/ICLG |
| 5 | "APT." | Rosé & Bruno Mars | The Black Label/Atlantic |
| 6 | "Birds of a Feather" | Billie Eilish | Darkroom/Interscope/ICLG |
| 7 | "Not Like Us" | Kendrick Lamar | pgLang/Interscope/ICLG |
| 8 | "Lose Control" | Teddy Swims | SWIMS Int./Warner |
| 9 | "That's So True" | Gracie Abrams | Interscope/ICLG |
| 10 | "Beautiful Things" | Benson Boone | Night Street/Warner |

MARS: JOHN V. ESPARZA. ROSÉ: PASCAL LE SEGRETAIN/GETTY IMAGES.

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*Market share for the top 10 Top Radio Airplay publishers was based upon the overall top 100 detected songs from 3,066 U.S. radio stations electronically monitored by Mediabase and provided to Luminate 24 hours a day, seven days a week during the period of Jan. 1 to March 31. For the top 10 publishers of Hot 100 Songs, percentage calculations were based upon the top 100 songs as ranked by the Billboard Hot 100, which were calculated from digital sales, streaming and Luminate-tracked radio airplay detections from Dec. 27, 2024, to March 27, 2025, reflecting the 2025 issue dates of Jan. 11 to April 5. Publisher information for musical works on both charts was identified by the Harry Fox Agency. A "publisher" is defined as an administrator, copyright owner and/or controlling party.

# NMPA *congratulates*

## TOP Q1 PUBLISHERS

### Hot 100

Sony Music Publishing
Warner Chappell Music
UMPG
Kobalt
BMG
Recognition Music
Reservoir Media
Pulse Music
Whooping Crane
Mothership Music Publishing

### Radio Airplay

Sony Music Publishing
Warner Chappell Music
UMPG
Kobalt
BMG
Pulse Music
Recognition Music
Concord Music Publishing
Reservoir Media
Spirit Music Group

NMPA
IS ABOUT THE SONGS

**Big Loud** sold a stake in **Morgan Wallen's** recording catalog to **Chord Music Partners**.

**Universal Music Group Nashville** rebranded as **MCA**.

## From The Desk Of...

# PER SUNDIN

### CEO, POPHOUSE ENTERTAINMENT

BY ELIZABETH DILTS MARSHALL

**IN 2022, POPHOUSE** Entertainment premiered *ABBA Voyage* in London, a virtual concert in which avatars of the Swedish power-pop foursome as they appeared in 1979 — one of them Pophouse co-founder Björn Ulvaeus — performed their biggest hits in ABBA Arena, a custom-built venue at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park that seats 3,000.

More than 40 years after ABBA's initial success and the subsequent popularity of the *Mamma Mia!* musicals and movies, fans have purchased more than 3.3 million tickets to over 1,000 *ABBA Voyage* shows, according to Pophouse, which cost approximately $185 million to mount. Now, armed with $1.3 billion from its first round of private equity fundraising and the backing of Swedish investment giant EQT, Pophouse CEO Per Sundin is eager to replicate the franchise's success.

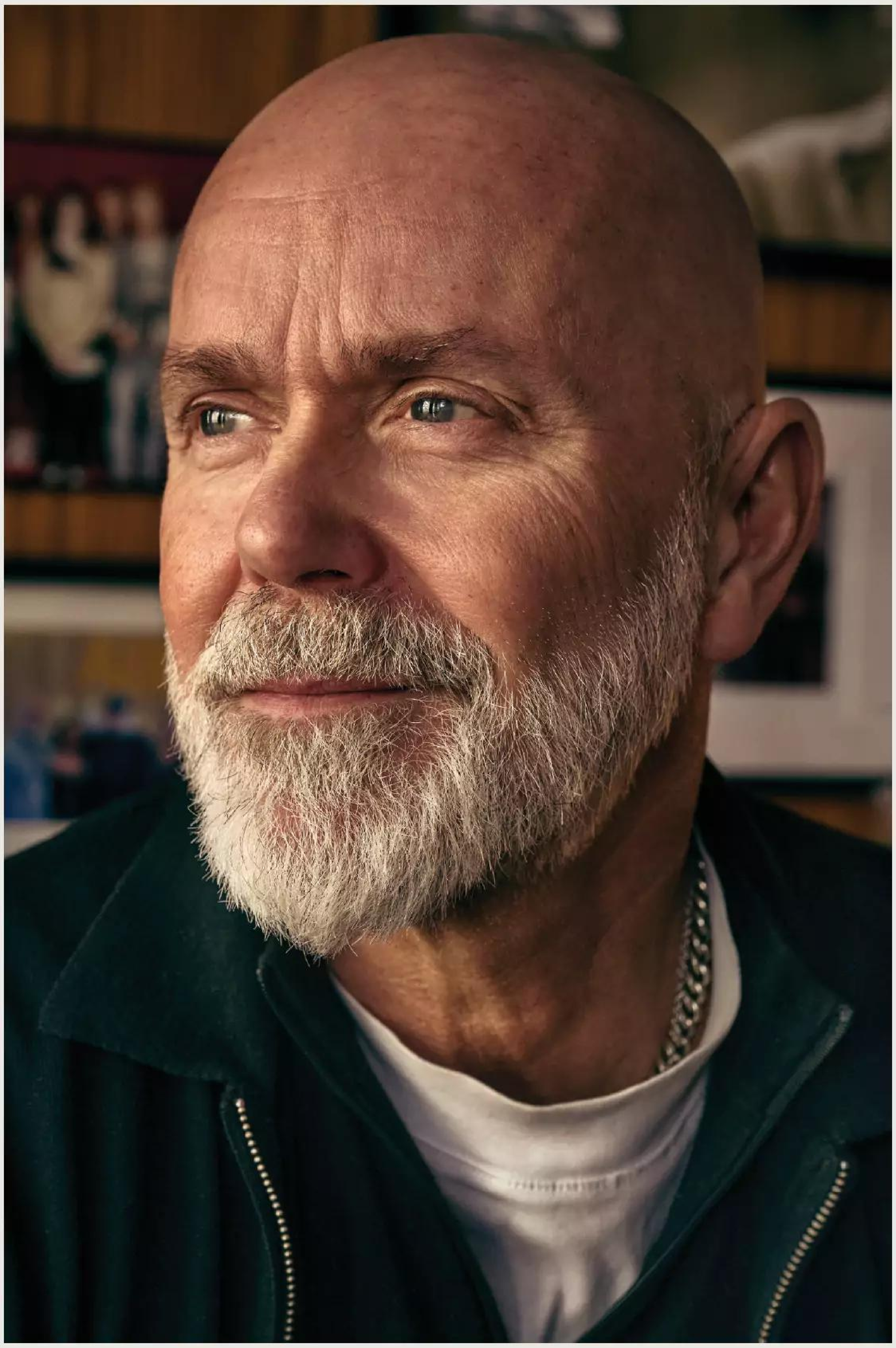
Sitting in front of photos of Michael Jackson, Destiny's Child, Lana del Rey, Billie Eilish, Barry Gibb and other artists Sundin worked with during the decades he spent as Sony and later Universal Music Group's top executive in the Nordics, he sees *ABBA Voyage* as a template to attract the devoted fan bases of certain other acts. KISS, which completed its End of the Road tour in 2023 and whose catalog Pophouse acquired the following year, will be the next act to get the avatar treatment. Another possible candidate is Cyndi Lauper, whose farewell tour ends in August and whose catalog Pophouse owns. The company's portfolio also includes the catalogs of two of Sweden's most famous electronic music artists, Swedish House Mafia and the late DJ Avicii, for whom the company recently said it will release new music.

Speaking at the New York offices of law firm Morrison Foerster, Sundin says Pophouse didn't cut any corners in creating *ABBA Voyage* — even footing a "shocking" Dolce & Gabanna clothing bill, Sundin says, for the avatars' costumes. ("They should have sponsored us, it was so expensive," he jokes.)

Sundin says that after KISS vocalist-guitarist Paul Stanley saw *ABBA Voyage*, he asked to meet the band members backstage. Pophouse, he adds, is dedicated to producing the same realism for the blood-spitting, fire-breathing "Black Diamond" boys.

**Geopolitical uncertainty and tariffs have not directly affected music assets. Did that motivate investors who participated in this latest funding round?**

I don't want to comment on what's going on in the world today because I can't guess where anything is going. But music is totally uncorrelated to inflation or interest rates, and that is a key message for people who invest from the financial world. When we said to investors, "This is a yield business because you have royalties coming in every quarter," the financial support for music is fantastic. Even though you have tough



CARL THORBORG

**Warner Music Group** hired **Armin Zerza** as executive vp/CFO, succeeding **Bryan Castellani**.

**Ole Obermann** and **Rachel Newman** were named co-heads at **Apple Music**.

times, maybe you don't go out to restaurants or do big trips, but you will never cancel your Spotify, YouTube or Apple account.

**You may not cancel your Spotify account, but you do buy fewer Broadway tickets. How are you changing your forecasts for the ABBA virtual show or other live-entertainment projects?**
You have to value in assumptions and calculations for every venture, but we're not going to do nothing for four years. The world we're living in, it's always SNAFU [an acronym for "situation's normal: all fucked up"]. There is also opportunity. There is so much need for entertainment. *ABBA Voyage* is the next generation of music concerts. It's on seven days a week, and it's almost always sold out. I've been 16 times, and I'm emotionally connected every time. That's how contagious this show is. Of the 50 biggest artists in the world still alive, I would say that 40 have been there to see it.

**Given the show's popularity with big stars, how's your pipeline for acquisitions?**
Really good. The press release about how much money we raised helped. We hope to announce at least one catalog we're buying by summer. But we don't just want to buy it and put it on the shelf. We create a road map for five to 10 years, and then we execute that road map. From the beginning, we told our investors that we want to buy eight to 10 catalogs. We have four. That leaves six to buy. The record companies have thousands of catalogs.

**In the United States, ABBA Arena would be comparable to Sphere in Las Vegas. Will the KISS virtual show take place there?**
No. The Sphere is a fantastic building, a fantastic venue, but for the type of avatar concert we are planning with KISS — which is something else — we are looking at more intimate sites. I've been to the Sphere four times [to see U2 live, a video replay of a U2 show, Anyma and the Eagles]. The first time I saw U2 at Sphere, the visuals were amazing, but I didn't feel emotionally connected. Bono is a preacher. He has something to say to the world, and I didn't find he was in the right element. I saw U2 virtual [a recording of a prior Sphere performance], and Bono was more of a preacher there. With U2 [both times], I asked people, "Did you go for U2 or did you go for the Sphere?" Two-thirds said they went there for the Sphere.

> **"On Spotify, 2% of listeners of a catalog stand for 80% of a catalog's streams in an average month or year. In some cases, we have found 5% [of listeners] stand for 50% of streams. If I can increase an act's superfans from 5% to 6%, the total streams will go up 10%, meaning the value of the catalog will go up 10%."**

**How will you give KISS fans something new for the virtual show?**
Every catalog we buy will not be an avatar show. ABBA was only active for eight to nine years. KISS toured for 40. Kiss is more male-biased. ABBA is more female-biased. But they both have fans of all ages. That's why their brands are so valuable. If you're a KISS fan, you're a fan for life.

**Pophouse also owns Avicii's catalog, another artist with hyper-engaged fans who are very sensitive to coverage and monetization of that catalog, given his suicide at the age of 28 in 2018. Would Pophouse buy another catalog that comes with a significant risk of offending fans?**
There is so much data available to look at before we buy catalogs today. We also do brand and narrative due diligence. KISS has superfans. Taylor Swift has superfans. The same goes with Avicii. On Spotify, 2% of listeners of a catalog stand for 80% of a catalog's streams in an average month or year. In some cases, we have found 5% [of listeners] stand for 50% of streams. If I can increase an act's superfans from 5% to 6%, the total streams will go up 10%, meaning the value of the catalog will go up 10%.

So back to your question about sensitivity: We take this very seriously. With KISS, there are fans that have been fans for 50 years. We did deep research and collected 10 people into a superfan panel and invited them to Vegas [in mid-March]. In workshops, we asked them what they would expect, what they liked and didn't like because we respect them. That doesn't mean we will do everything they say. We will adapt their feedback for the next 50 years.

We're going to do a superfan panel with Avicii, too. His parents are very close to me personally since I signed Avicii in 2010. I am probably the person who is saying, "Do as little as possible." There are a lot of things Avicii never released, and we are doing *Avicii Forever*, a collection of his best songs — and one new song.

**What's a challenge you encountered in your career, and how did you overcome it?**
The first decade of the century was a true roller coaster for me, but also for everyone in the music industry. It started with the best year ever selling CDs, then came Napster, LimeWire and, eventually, Pirate Bay. Sweden was the most pirated country in the world, and I had to restructure Sony Music Nordic. Then came the merger between Sony Music and BMG, and I moved to Universal Music Nordic. I had to let more than 300 people go, and the music market in Sweden decreased 50%. We tried everything to overcome the shrinking market: ringtones, iTunes and many more. Nothing compensated. When I joined Universal in April 2008, UM Sweden had the lowest digital revenue based on micro [gross domestic product]. Spotify was launched that October, and I decided to go all-in and sign as many new and established artists as possible: Avicii, Alesso, Tove Lo and many more. In 2013, Universal Music Sweden had the highest digital revenue on micro GDP in the [entirety] of Universal Music.

**What are you most proud of from your career?**
Every artist you sign to a label you feel in some way connected to them. I don't think they always feel connected to you, but to sign an artist or band is such an important decision [for everyone involved]. Even though I've left Sony and Universal, I continue to follow the careers of the artists I signed. It's emotional. It's about creating an entertainment brand or artist who can live on their creativity. It's fantastic.

**Save The Music FOUNDATION**

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We're donating our ad space in *Billboard* to amplify voices of activists, organizations, and charities that reflect our core values and are creating real change.

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WARNER MUSIC GROUP

# 21 Under 21

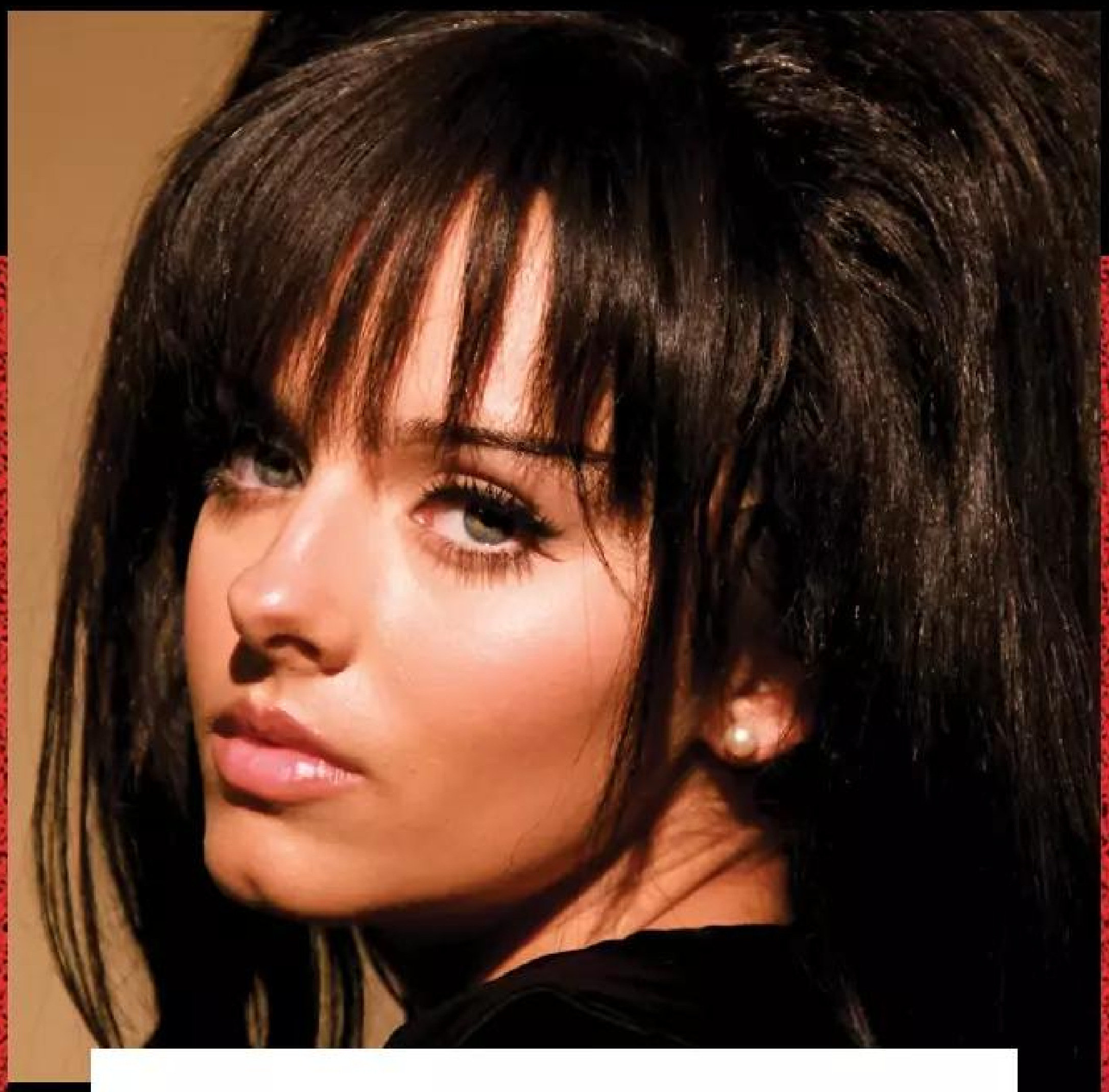
*Billboard*'s annual 21 Under 21 list snapshots the next generation of rising artists — but in 2025, the inescapable teen superstar has become increasingly rare. Ten years ago, this list was stocked full of acts who were already household names: Lorde, Shawn Mendes, Fifth Harmony and 5 Seconds of Summer. In 2021, Olivia Rodrigo and Billie Eilish were both on the list. This year, however, such future stars are still ascending to ubiquity.

"There's not a centralization of key platforms where people are finding artists," says Mike Weiss, vp of music/head of A&R at UnitedMasters. "Everything is more niche. To become a superstar, it takes time to build from community to community and expand that base."

That process is typically "a lot longer now," says Tyler Brown, co-founder of indie label Heatwave Records, relative to the peak years when he worked at Syco Entertainment on *The X Factor*. In previous decades, stars were minted by the TV shows and radio stations that served as the central source of music discovery. Major labels had the marketing resources and relationships to inundate these formats, sending listeners scrambling to cough up cash for records or CDs or downloads.

Today's fans are spread across a range of streaming services and social media platforms, each with its own priorities and approach to music. In this fractured environment, "there's no button to push" to blitz everyone simultaneously, says Jonathan Daniel, co-founder of Crush Music, which manages Miley Cyrus and Lorde, among others. "It's so much less of a monoculture."

As a result, this year's 21 Under 21 leans lighter on pop than in previous years, with a handful of talent rooted in country music — plus, the first dancehall act to make it onto the list. —ELIAS LEIGHT



## Jessie Murph

**AGE** 20

**LABEL** Columbia Records

**PUBLISHER** Sony Music Publishing

**MANAGEMENT** Disruptor Management

In April, Murph made her Coachella debut — and it's one of her proudest moments from the past year. "Seeing the show and production and everything at that level was such a pinch-me moment," she says. During the set, she welcomed collaborators Polo G (last year's "Heartbroken" with Diplo) and Koe Wetzel ("High Road," which was also released in 2024 and scored Murph her highest-charting Billboard Hot 100 hit at No. 22) onstage, spotlighting how she walks the line of hip-hop and country. "There are so many outside influences and opinions both online and in real life, it can become really hard to not get distracted or confused," Murph says. "I've noticed I'm always the most successful when I follow my gut and do what feels right in my soul."

## d4vd

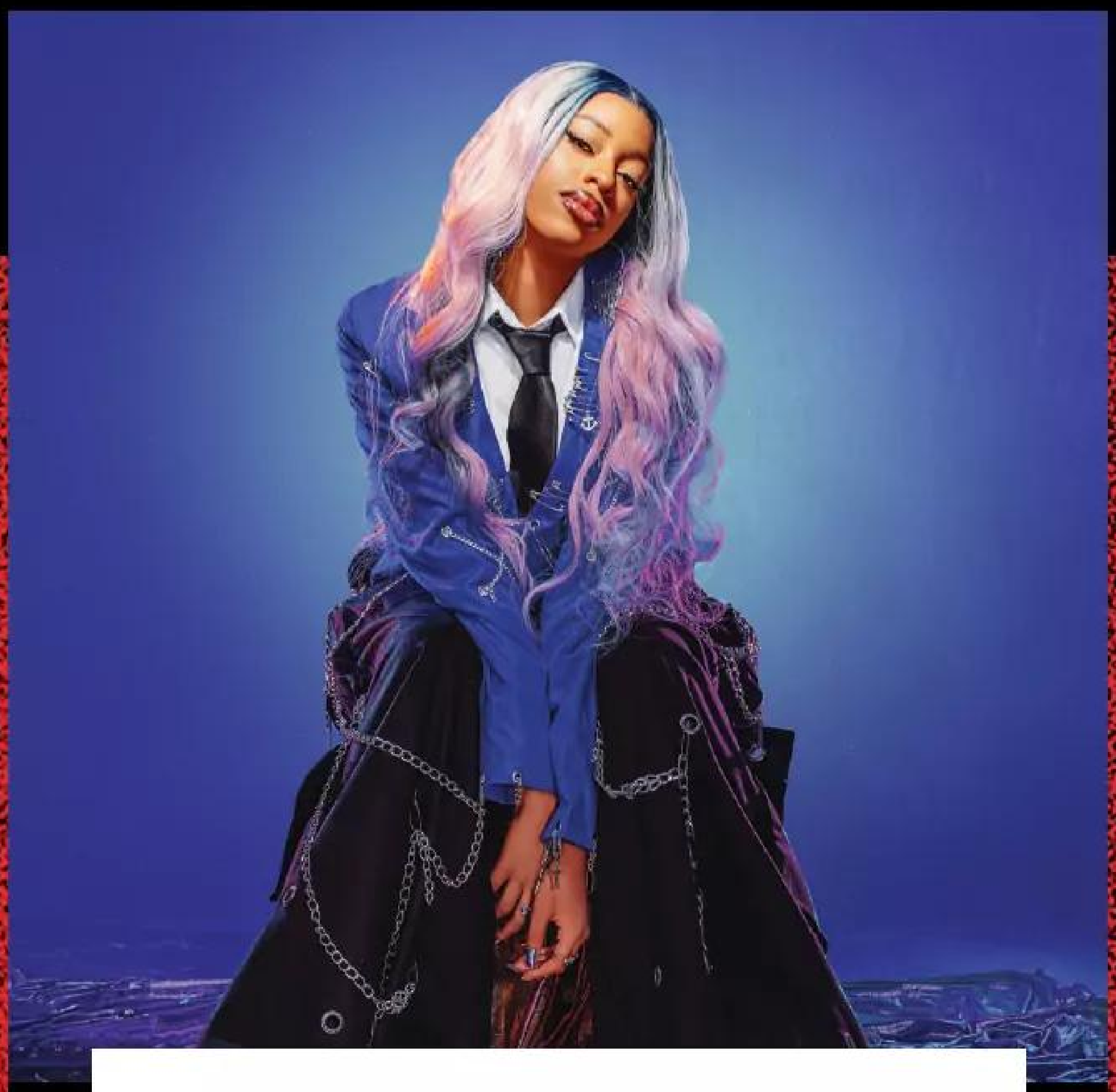
**AGE** 20

**LABEL** Darkroom Records/Interscope Records

**PUBLISHER** Sony Music Publishing

**MANAGEMENT** Mogul Vision

Alternative artist d4vd has released a steady stream of singles since the arrival of his 2023 debut EP, *Petals to Thorns*, priming fans for his anticipated debut full-length. In late April, after he performed at Coachella for the first time, *Withered* finally arrived, featuring Kali Uchis on single "Crashing." Reflecting on his timeline, the artist says he's most proud of his output: "I released a handful of amazing singles and synchs back-to-back while maintaining consistent high quality with each record... There's no formula because the internet is changing every day, so I just make great music and promote it in ways that feel natural and true to me."



## Qing Madi

**AGE** 18

**LABEL** Jton Music/Columbia Records

**PUBLISHER** BuVision

**MANAGEMENT** Jton Music

In the last year, Nigerian singer-songwriter Madi says she has "been able to connect with more people through my music, perform on bigger stages and really step into my sound." She performed in Uganda and Algeria last fall and this January released her debut studio album, *I Am the Blueprint*. Its standout track, "Feeling Alright," reached No. 15 on the Billboard U.S. Afrobeats Songs list, becoming her highest-charting entry. In April, she won songwriter of the year at The Headies, which annually celebrate accomplishments across the Nigerian music industry. "Seeing my hard work pay off and knowing that my music resonates with people means everything to me," she says. "Staying true to who I am and pushing through the doubts has been key."

## KATSEYE

**NAMES** Daniela, Lara, Manon, Megan, Sophia, Yoonchae

**AGES** 20, 19, 22, 19, 22, 17

**LABEL** HYBE x Geffen

**PUBLISHER** HYBE x Geffen

**MANAGEMENT** HYBE x Geffen

From left: Megan, Yoonchae, Daniela, Lara, Sophia and Manon.

**LAST YEAR,** when KATSEYE gave its first live performance at Los Angeles' Crypto.com Arena for the annual K-pop festival KCON, the group's Megan remembers it as "chaotic but so much fun." It was the first test of the members' bond, with the girl group now saying strong communication is the key to navigating music industry madness. "We had to learn to be there for each other," Sophia says. "We're able to just come up to one another, good or bad, and say, 'Hey, I feel this way.' " The HYBE x Geffen act will showcase that growth this spring with its second EP, *Beautiful Chaos*, which follows 2024's *SIS (Soft Is Strong)* that spawned the Mainstream Top 40 hit "Touch." As Manon teases: "This next era is really authentic to who we are."

**What are you most proud of when you look back at this past year?**

**LARA** The MAMA Awards. That was our first time doing a big dance break as a group with dancers; there were cheerleaders and a full-on production. Every time I look back on that, I'm like, "Oh, my God. We did that."

**What has been the key to success in your first year as a group?**

**SOPHIA** The biggest thing that we really learned together is communication. We care so deeply about each other, and this is something that we're all so passionate about — this isn't just our job. We're so lucky to do something that we all grew up obsessed with. We've learned that it's something we can connect through and that we have to be honest with each other all the time. At the end of the day, it's the six of us against the world.

**MEGAN** We really found our flow with each other and how each of us works in different scenarios. When we do performances [now], we're like, "OK, Megan needs to prepare in the corner, Yoonchae needs her own time, Sophia needs to warm up," and then we all come together. So thanks to that communication, we all know each other so well and so deeply.

**What can you share about what inspired your upcoming *Beautiful Chaos* EP?**

**MANON** I always say this, but I feel like [fan army] the EYEKONS and [us] are the same people. We think the same; what they like, we like, and what we like, they like.

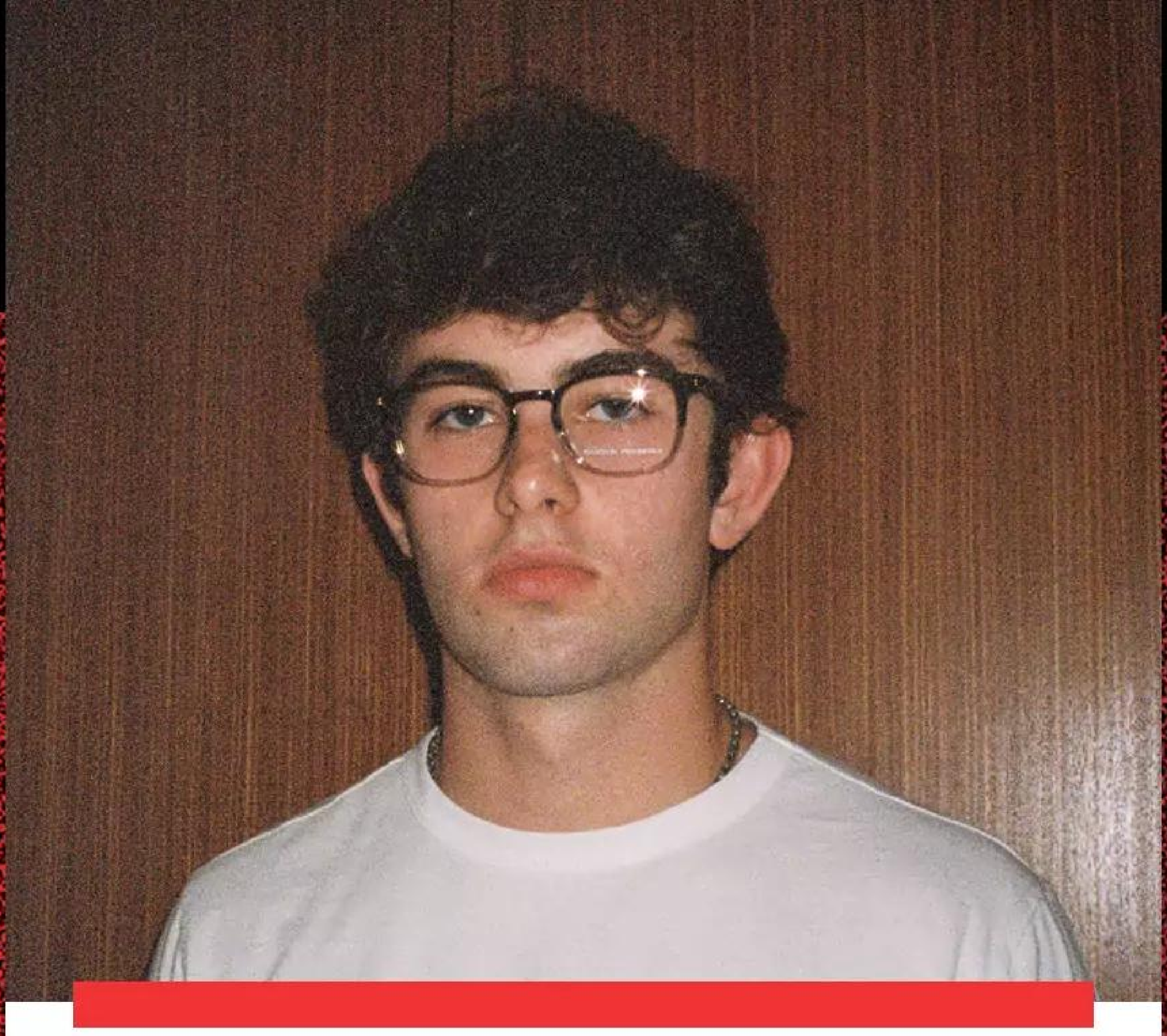
**SOPHIA** We are always on Weverse; we're lurking through Instagram and Twitter. We literally see everything that the fans post and hear them, so hopefully, they'll like what we're coming out with.

**What's the best advice you would give aspiring young musicians?**

**YOONCHAE** To believe in yourself and do whatever you want.

**DANIELA** It's important to not let others decide your path.

MURPH: ASHLEY OLAH. D4VD: MAX DURANTE. MADI: KELECHI AMADI OBI. KATSEYE: RAHUL BHATT.



## Ian

**AGE** 19

**LABEL** BuVision/Columbia Records

**PUBLISHER** Kobalt Music

**MANAGEMENT** Mixed Management

**LATELY, IAN'S WHIRLWIND SUCCESS** has made him feel more like Jim Carrey's character in *The Truman Show* than the former college rugby star he was while attending Clemson University less than two years ago. "Putting yourself out there consistently is difficult," says the artist born Ian Smith. "You're beating a dead horse sometimes." After emerging with his debut project, *Valedictorian*, last summer, the hip-hop rookie scored his first Hot 100 hit, "Hate Me" (with Lil Yachty), while his viral "Magic Johnson" — his ode to the Los Angeles Lakers great — topped the Bubbling Under Hot 100. With his 2024 debut full-length, *Goodbye Horses*, starting at No. 86 on the Billboard 200, the 19-year-old is only warming up, with his eyes set on more wins: "I feel like the bar is in heaven."

**What has been your key to success?**
Talking to my mom and dad and sister. That is numero uno. You meet so many people in the music industry, and unless you're coming into it with a whole squadron of your boys from day one who will stick by you at every moment of your career, it's easy to get in your head about the people that you're meeting and who you want to keep around. There's no stress in that regard with family ever.

**What's your best advice for aspiring young artists?**
I need a lot of advice at this point in my career, so it's difficult to confidently give out any good pointers to anyone looking to do what I'm doing. I will say: You are absolutely not the only person who doesn't know what you're doing — unless you do, in which case, shout out, keep it up. That's great. But nobody knows what the fuck is going on at any point in time. As long as you love making music and that's your purpose, I don't think you run into much difficulty.

**How do you deal with criticism at your age?**
You have to be able to recognize the difference between constructive criticism and something that's just coming from a place of hatred. Sometimes, the person commenting is just trying to attack your character because, for whatever reason, they don't feel comfortable enough with themself.

**What was it like working with Chief Keef and Lil Yachty this early in your career?**
Incredible, mind-blowing, sensational. I listened to both of them so much in middle and high school. They just ran my world. It was crazy to think about being in the back seat of the car, looking out the window, picturing myself as the one who made the Chief Keef or Lil Yachty song that I was listening to. Then, being able to step in and not just work with them but enjoy working with them, interact with them and see how they might act in real life was crazy.

## Ivan Cornejo

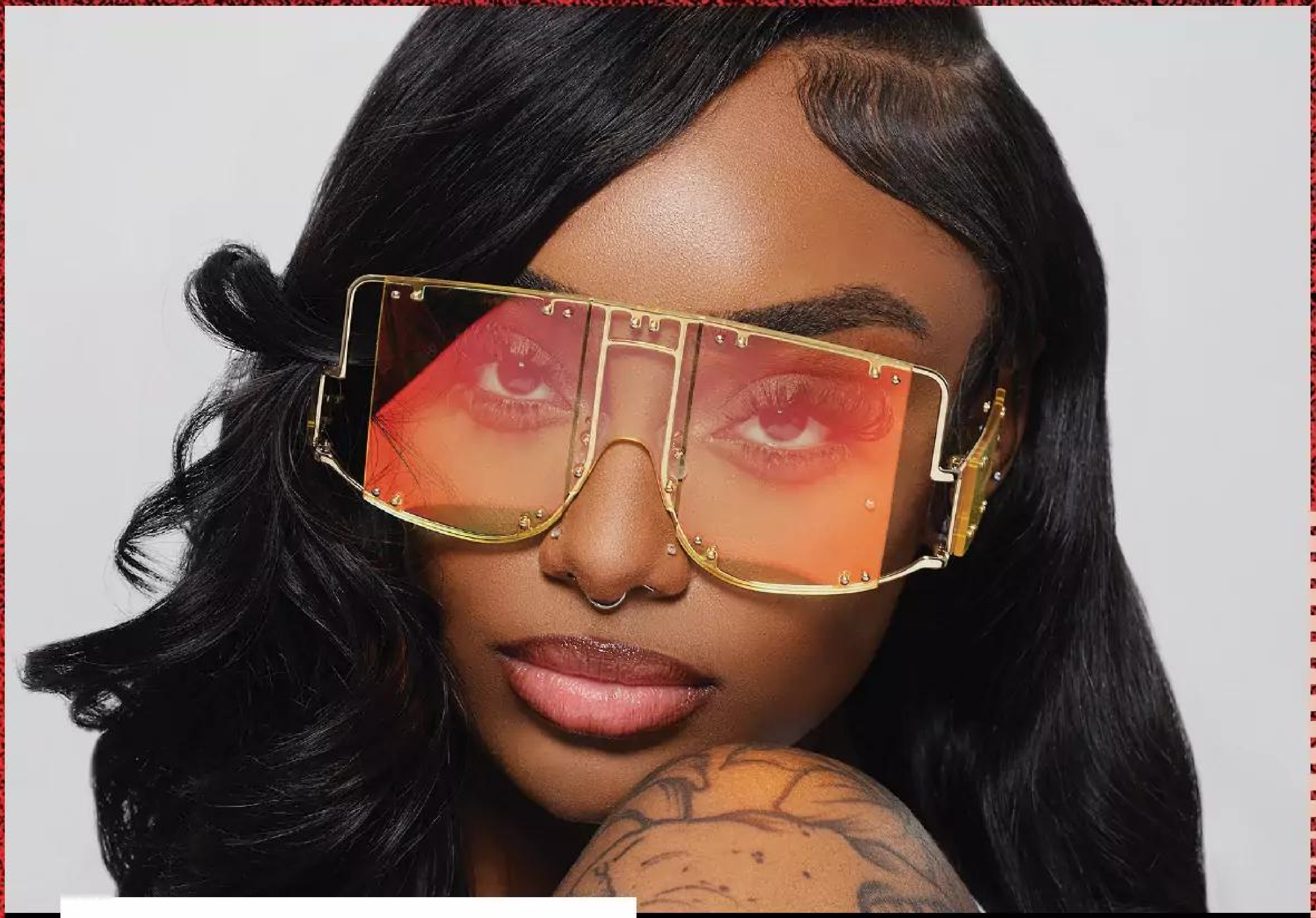
**AGE** 20

**LABEL** Interscope Records

**PUBLISHER** Universal Music Publishing Group

**MANAGEMENT** Pamela Cornejo

*Música mexicana* star Cornejo's Coachella debut in April follows a string of major achievements for the 20-year-old star. They include performing at the 2024 Houston Rodeo where he sang in front of 70,000 people, which he says is a milestone he's most proud of. But it's not his only one: Last August, the singer-songwriter scored his first No. 1 on the Top Latin Albums chart with *Mirada*, his third full-length. The set led to two legs of his *Mirada* tour, the second of which began in April. He credits his success to "staying humble, grounded and knowing you have a team that truly has only the best intentions for you."



## Lay Bankz

**AGE** 20

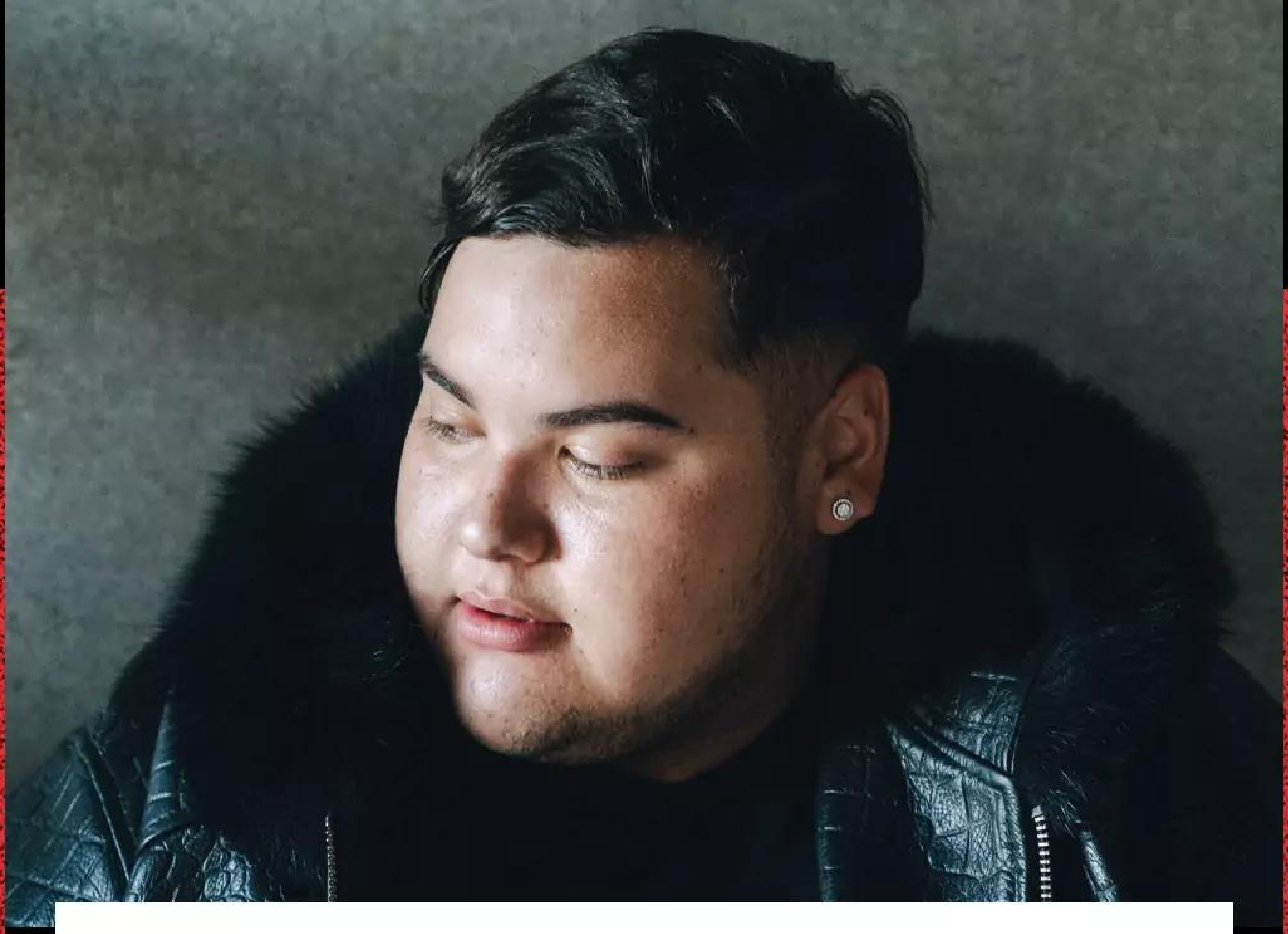
**LABEL** Artist Partner Group

**PUBLISHER** Artist Partner Group

**MANAGEMENT** Venice Management

After making her Hot 100 debut in 2024 with the flirty pop-rap track "Tell Ur Girlfriend," Philadelphia artist Bankz has spent the past year building on that success. She released her debut album, *After 7*, in May 2024; signed an Under Armour deal in December; and kicked off 2025 with her latest single, "Baddie Decisions." While she has maintained her momentum, Bankz is equally focused on prioritizing her mental health. "It's very hard to work on something at a high level constantly and not feel overwhelmed sometimes," she says. "I think when you challenge yourself in ways you haven't before, there's no way of anticipating an outcome. But consistency and resilience have made me great."

IAN: ZHAMAK FULLAD. CORNEJO: OZZY ARIAS. BANKZ: JORDAN DIOMANDÉ.



## FloyyMenor

**AGE** 19

**LABEL** UnitedMasters

**PUBLISHERS** Sony Music Publishing Chile/Sony ATV Latin Music Publishing

**MANAGEMENT** Luis Arce

Last year was historic for Chilean newcomer FloyyMenor (born Alan Felipe Galleguillos). The then-18-year-old topped Hot Latin Songs with Cris MJ with their viral hit, “Gata Only,” becoming the first Chilean artists to reach No. 1 on the chart since 1991. The song ruled the tally for 14 consecutive weeks, finished at No. 1 on the year-end Hot Latin Songs chart and won the Global 200 Latin song of the year at the 2024 Billboard Latin Music Awards and top Latin song at the Billboard Music Awards. “There are several challenges that one faces being so young, such as having to mature quickly,” FloyyMenor says. “You also have to learn how to navigate this industry and learn about contracts and legal terms… The key to success for me has always been believing in myself, being clear about my vision and not letting it go.”

## Sombr

**AGE** 19

**LABEL** Warner Records

**PUBLISHER** Self-published

**MANAGEMENT** Ann Perkins

With two hits on the Hot 100, fast-rising radio traction and frequent appearances on daily streaming charts, the 19-year-old Lower East Side native born Shane Boose is enjoying a meteoric rise thanks to his singles “Back to Friends” and “Undressed.” The former peaked at No. 55 while the latter reached No. 83; both songs riff on alt-rock hallmarks from a generation ago that have been absent from the mainstream for years. “My favorite band of all time is Radiohead,” Sombr says, “and I’m a big fan of Jeff Buckley, Phoebe Bridgers, The 1975. I listen to a ton of alternative music — it’s my genre.” Despite Sombr’s breakthrough, his career has been years in the making; after his 2022 single “Caroline” went viral, Warner Records signed him in 2023. “I’m a really hard worker,” he says. “I like to think that, if you really put in the hours and manifest what you want, it will happen.”

## Ty Myers

**AGE** 17

**LABEL** RECORDS Nashville/Columbia

**PUBLISHER** Universal Music Publishing Group

**MANAGEMENT** Narvel Blackstock, Starstruck Entertainment

Myers’ career has surged over the past year: In January, he made his Hot 100 debut at No. 94, and he also released his debut album, *The Select* (which fuses his blues, country and rock influences), which he followed with a tour. “I’ve been headlining the biggest rooms of my career so far on the *Select* tour, and I’m just so grateful,” he says. “The connection people have had with my music is the driving force that [allows] me the opportunity of living out my dreams. The response has been nothing short of life-changing.”

## 310babii

**AGE** 19

**LABEL** High IQ/EMPIRE

**PUBLISHER** EMPIRE

**MANAGEMENT** Jentry Salvatore

310babii emerged at the forefront of the West Coast’s next wave of hip-hop stars with his 2024 breakthrough single — and Hot 100 debut hit — “Soak City (Do It),” but now his chief concern is transitioning from high school graduate to full-time artist. “I’m most proud of not dropping out of school and being able to graduate with my class on time last year,” he says. All the while, he was learning outside of the classroom, too: “The biggest challenge for a young artist in today’s music industry is becoming educated on the ins and outs to different contracts and agreements to artist development and more,” he says. “It’s not about getting hot for a moment but having your business in order and maintaining a career.”

FLOYYMENOR: BASTIAN VENEGA. MYERS: EMILY VINSON. SOMBR: BRYCE GLENN. 310BABII: PICO SHAW.

## Chino Pacas

**AGE** 18
**LABEL** Street Mob Records
**PUBLISHER** Street Mob Publishing
**MANAGEMENT** Luis Lopez

**PACAS HAD AN UNLIKELY ASSIST** early in his career from none other than Drake. Last October, the Mexican-born singer teamed with the superstar and Fuerza Regida for "Modo Capone" after Drake DM'd Pacas on Instagram. The song hit No. 11 on Hot Latin Songs. Four months later, Pacas and Drake reteamed on "Meet Your Padre" from the latter's joint album with PartyNextDoor. The song arrived in February, peaking at Nos. 63 and 103 on the Hot 100 and Billboard Global 200, respectively. In between his collaborations, Pacas (born Cristian Humberto Ávila Vega) released his debut album, *Que Sigan Llegando Las Pacas*, fueled by the raw emotion of *corridos tumbados* and *urban sierreño*. The 15-song set peaked at No. 6 on Top Regional Mexican Albums and No. 7 on Top Latin Albums. As he continues to forge his path in música mexicana — having already been co-signed by Peso Pluma, Junior H and Tito Double P — Pacas says he's already working on his next project, called *Cristian*, which he produced and promises will be "a more personal album."

**What does it signify to have two collaborations with Drake so early in your career?**
More than anything, I respect him. We all know how many years of a career he's had, and the fact that he's collaborating with me, even though I'm only two years into my career, is truly something incredible. I met him in person, but we keep in touch through Instagram — we say hello from time to time. Drake's professionalism and his years of a career are evident.

**What's the biggest challenge for a young artist in today's industry?**
Being young, I sometimes feel like my age is a great advantage. I feel like many of the people who listen to my music are my age, and I also feel like many people can relate.

**What has been your key to success?**
The natural way I've pursued my career and the fact that I always do it with my heart. I feel that to be famous, you have to be on another level. We're known, but not yet famous.

**What's your advice for aspiring young artists?**
To let themselves be guided by their emotions. Never let other people make them think differently, because the world can be changed with great ideas.

## Bayker Blankenship

**AGE** 19
**LABEL** Lone Star/Santa Anna
**PUBLISHER** Kobalt Publishing
**MANAGEMENT** 7s Management

Country artist Blankenship achieved a major milestone when his broken-hearted single "Maxed Out" — from his 2024 EP, *Younger Years* — was certified gold. "Just the feeling of knowing that all those people listened to that song and connected to it like they did was insane and meant the world," he says. The Livingston, Tenn., singer-songwriter is currently on the festival circuit, as well as supporting such acts on tour as Wyatt Flores and Whiskey Myers. As his career takes off, he cautions fellow young artists of one thing: "Don't let other people make the decisions you want to make."

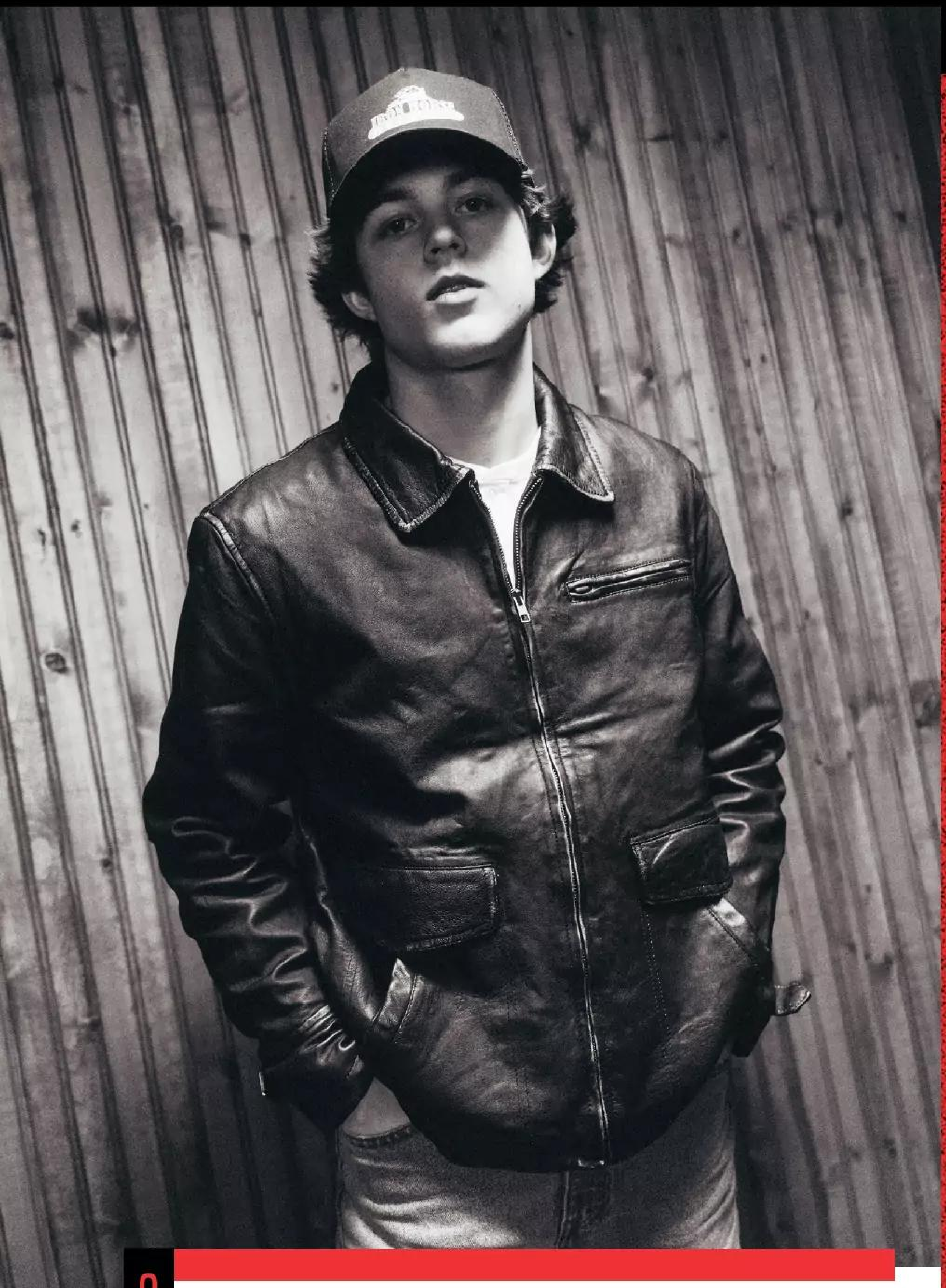
LOWBOWZ
EST. 2022

## Remy Bond

**AGE** 20
**LABEL** Warner Records
**PUBLISHER** Sony
**MANAGEMENT** Hallwood Media

Bond specializes in arresting, lyrically blunt dream-pop, a sound that helped her track "Summer Song" become a viral hit last year and yielded a deal with Warner Records in February. The New York native says that "finding a sound I like — and being stubborn about it" has been the key to her breakthrough, "even if it takes some time and pisses people off." After releasing the single "Simple Girl" earlier this year, Bond is finishing up her debut album and will launch a U.S. headlining tour on June 1 — but is still making time for necessary detours. "I went to the desert this year with my sister Olivia and my producer Jules [Apollinaire], and we spent two days working on an intro to a song that's not even coming out," she says. "I think it's important to let yourself spend time on even the littlest things."

PACAS: DANGY. BLANKENSHIP: LONE STAR/SANTA ANNA. BOND: KIRT BARNETT.



Q+A

## Waylon Wyatt

**AGE** 18

**LABEL** Music Soup/Darkroom Records

**PUBLISHER** WWP Publishing

**MANAGEMENT** Pretty Sweet Management

**AFTER BREAKING THROUGH** with "Arkansas Diamond," Wyatt released his debut EP, *Til the Sun Goes Down*, last November, which he wrote, produced and recorded in his childhood home. He followed with a pair of collaborations with fellow rising country act Bayker Blankenship on "Sunday Supper" and "Jailbreak." This year, the high school senior is balancing academics with live shows on his headlining *Til the Sun Goes Down* tour and, in June, will open for Zach Bryan at BST Hyde Park in London.

**What has been the key to your success so far?**
Love and support from every which way brought me here. I have supportive fans, but as soon as [I] come back home, I have a supportive family as well.

**Is it hard to balance home life with touring and recording?**
It has been a little bit harder for sure, but I always do my best to manage. I'm still in high school, so I have my prom coming up pretty soon and I'm playing that as well.

**You're working on new music. How has your music evolved?**
[I've] got more singles coming, but I'm going to try to put out a bigger piece of work. My previous EP was me recording in my kitchen just playing all my stuff. I want to experiment with this [next] EP, to put a lot more production into my work.

**What advice do you have for other artists wanting to build a career like yours?**
Just make sure it's really what you want to do and that you're willing to make those sacrifices for it.

From left: Lucia de la Garza, Salazar, Wong and Mila de la Garza.

RIOT TWEE
SAD PARK
EST 2015
WEST COAST EMOTION
You're looking at the end of the rainbow.

## The Linda Lindas

**NAMES** Mila de la Garza, Lucia de la Garza, Eloise Wong, Bela Salazar

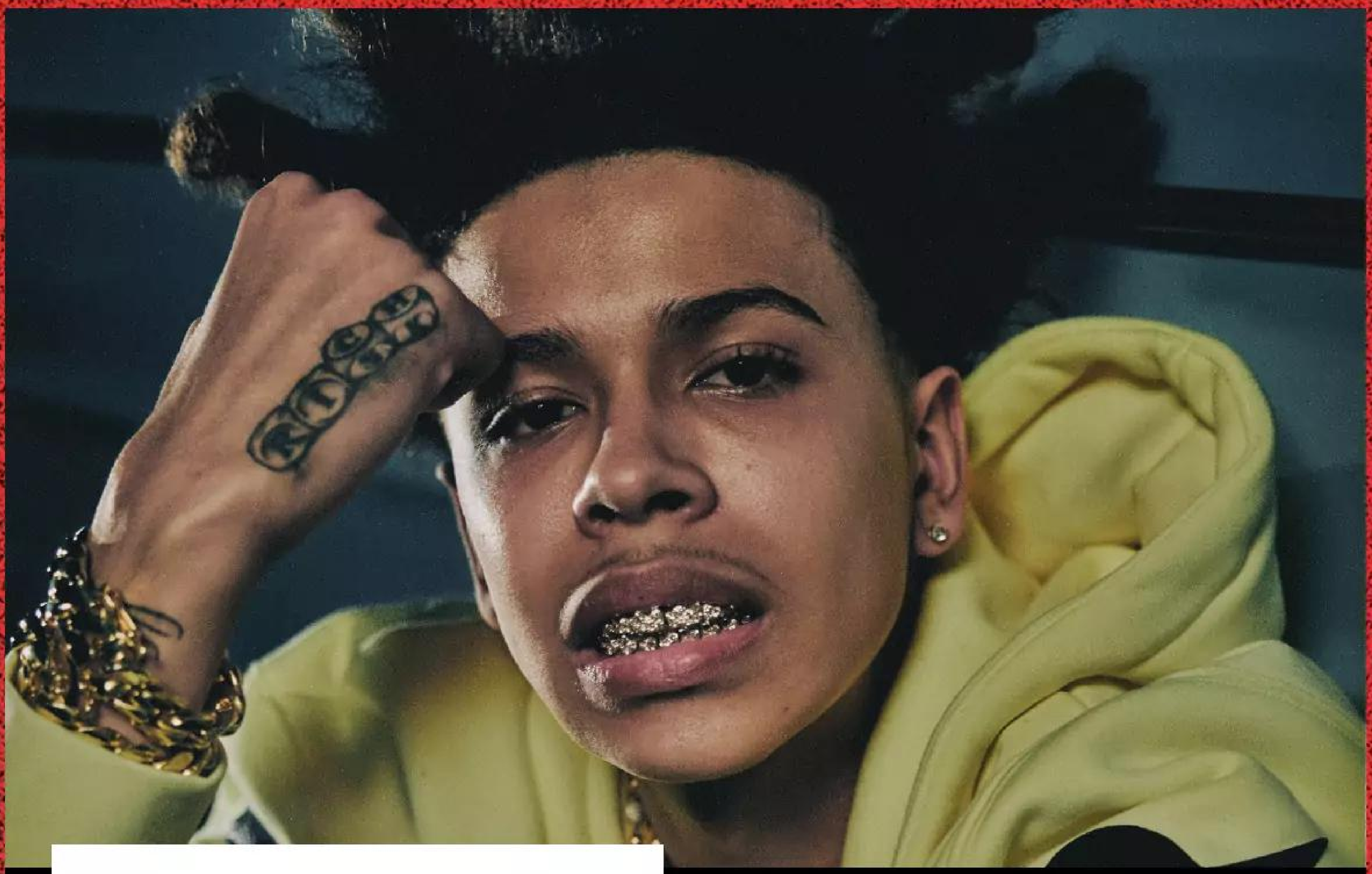
**AGES** 14, 18, 17, 20

**LABEL** Epitaph Records

**PUBLISHER** Warner Chappell Music

**MANAGEMENT** Fly South Music Group

Punk rockers The Linda Lindas celebrated the October release of sophomore album *No Obligation* with their first headlining tour. "It's exciting for us to see how many people have been showing up and singing along," Mila de la Garza says. "We've come such a long way from our first show at the Hi Hat six years ago, so we are all proud of our growth." *No Obligation* included the band's first album feature (with "Weird Al" Yankovic), while in late 2023, the group appeared on Paramore's remix album, *Re: This Is Why*, covering "The News." "When you become well known or established for a certain thing at such a young age," Lucia de la Garza says, "it doesn't make it the easiest to grow as an artist. We've had so much fun finding ourselves and our artistry outside of our one viral moment."



## Luh Tyler

**AGE** 19

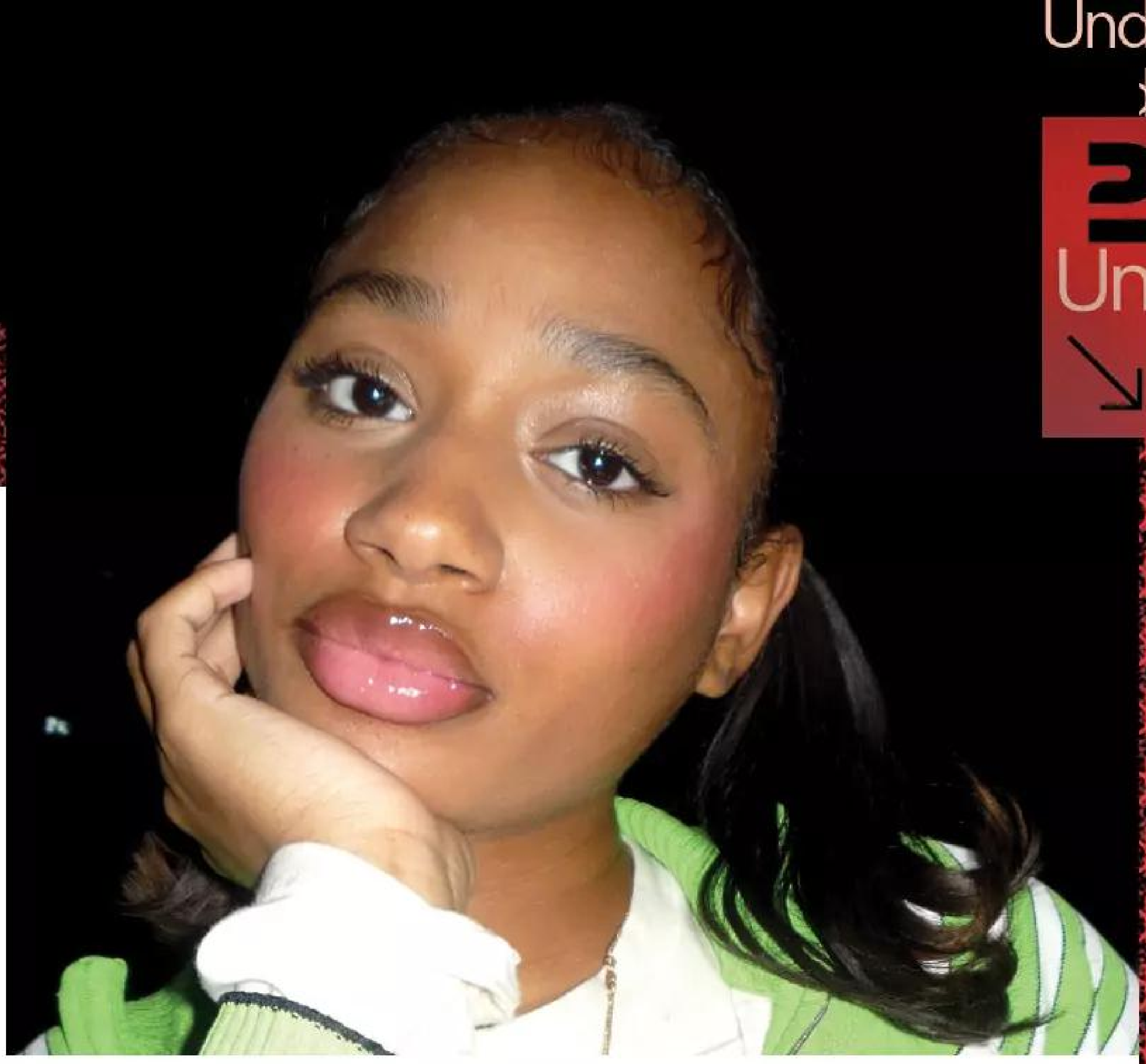
**LABEL** Motion Music/Atlantic Records

**PUBLISHER** Sony Music Publishing

**MANAGEMENT** Open Door Management, Minerva

Florida rapper Tyler has been working tirelessly since releasing his 2023 debut project, *My Vision*, which debuted at No. 2 on the Heatseekers Albums chart. The following year, the results paid off, with his mixtape *Mr. Skii* boasting features from BossMan Dlow, Kodak Black and Veeze. "I'm most proud of how my music has improved and how I have tried new and different flows that I haven't used before," says Tyler, who spent most of last year touring with Atlantic Records labelmate A Boogie Wit Da Hoodie. "I am way better and more versatile than I was before… The more you practice, the better you get."

WYATT: JOSEF LLOYD. THE LINDA LINDAS: SANTIAGO ORELLANA. TYLER: AUSTIN SIMKINS (SALTY).



## Laila!

**AGE** 19

**LABEL** IIIXL/SoundCloud

**PUBLISHER** Baby Genius Publishing

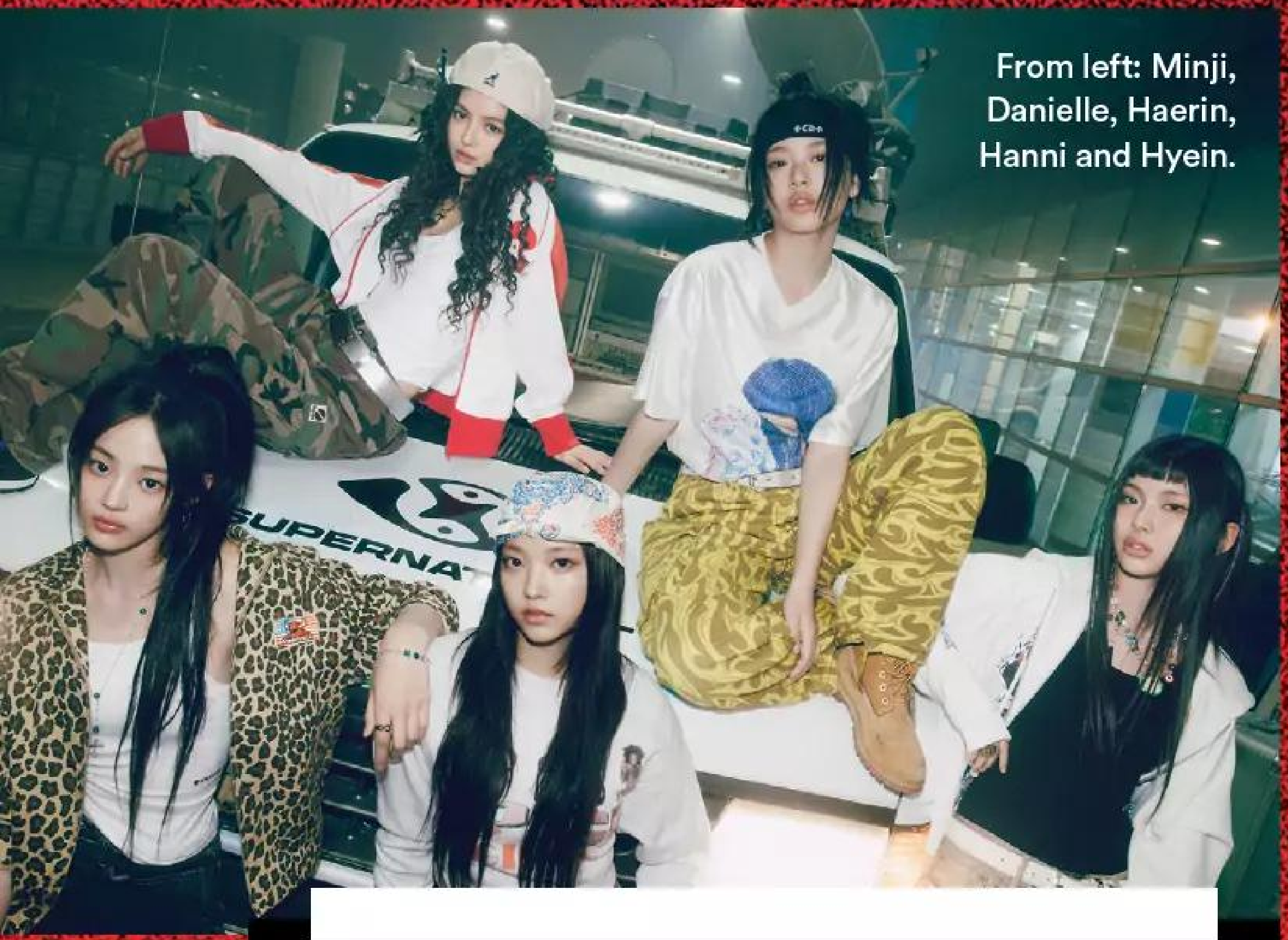
**MANAGEMENT** Lailabug Productions

**WHEN LAILA! PERFORMED** her viral TikTok songs on YouTube channel On the Radar last summer, fans were finally able to put a face to her name — and her career took off from there. "Like That" reached No. 3 on the TikTok Billboard Top 50 chart, while "Not My Problem" hit No. 25 on Hot R&B Songs; a later remix featured 14 artists. She celebrated her streak with a 10-city North American tour and plans to hit Europe this summer. "I'm really proud of myself," she says about touring right after graduating high school. "I didn't know that it would unfold this way. I thought I was going to have to get a regular job after high school."

**What are you most proud of so far?**
I'm most proud of making my grandma proud of me and seeing her reactions to everything I'm doing, and my family. I feel like that's my biggest accomplishment, seeing how happy my family is.

**What's the biggest lesson you've learned?**
I've learned to take everything in and be in the moment. This is only the beginning, and these things are only going to happen once, you know?

**What has been the key to your success?**
[Social media is] probably one of the most important aspects because that's where I got my start by posting stuff on TikTok while I was still in high school, not knowing if anyone was going to see it or care about it. That's the main way I interact with my listeners and put new stuff out there. But I feel like this tour has given me the opportunity to make that social media interaction a real-life interaction, where I get to really talk to people and meet them and sign merch and take pictures and just have fun. It's really exciting to have that crossover because performing is becoming one of the most important things that I do, too.



From left: Minji, Danielle, Haerin, Hanni and Hyein.

## NewJeans

**NAMES** Minji, Hanni, Danielle, Haerin, Hyein

**AGES** 21, 20, 20, 19, 17

**LABEL** ADOR

**PUBLISHER** HYBE/Sony Music Publishing

**MANAGEMENT** ADOR

While NewJeans has made more headlines in recent months due to its legal battle with label home HYBE — and announced a break in activity in March — the past year demonstrated the continued fan enthusiasm for the K-pop quintet through chart impact. Second EP *Get Up*, which topped the Billboard 200 in 2023, earned an additional 227,000 equivalent album units last year, according to Luminate, and landed at No. 3 on the 2024 year-end World Albums chart and No. 50 on Top Album Sales. NewJeans' two single releases in 2024, "How Sweet" and "Supernatural," earned 51.6 million and 41.2 million official on-demand U.S. streams, respectively, for the year. Plus, HYBE reports that the physical versions of both singles sold over 1 million copies globally, marking the group's fourth and fifth consecutive physical releases to reach the threshold.

## Najeeriii

**AGE** 19

**LABEL** N/A

**PUBLISHER** N/A

**MANAGEMENT** N/A

Ascendant Jamaican dancehall star Najeeriii has fine-tuned his style and sound since exploding onto the scene with 2023's "Paddle Boat." *Book of Bob*, his debut studio album, will arrive later this year, and the Portmore-based artist has used a steady stream of singles and collaborations — like 2024's RajahWild-assisted "Life a Di Party" and "1Rifle" — to set the scene. Even so, he says that the biggest challenge for a young artist today is "to be taken seriously." But having already established himself as one of the genre's most promising voices, Najeeriii maintains that "patience" is his best key to success: "Learn your abilities," he says, "and utilize your strengths and weaknesses."

## Maddox Batson

**AGE** 15

**LABEL** Prosper Entertainment/Warner Records

**PUBLISHER** Warner Chappell Music

**MANAGEMENT** Prosper Entertainment

The 15-year-old country artist already has an impressive credit as co-writer of Quavo and Lana Del Rey's pop-country-trap hit, "Tough," and has now turned to his own career with the March release of his debut EP, *First Dance*, for which he co-wrote all seven songs. After performing at Stagecoach in April, Batson will join Lainey Wilson's *Whirlwind* tour in the fall. Through it all, he says the biggest challenge has been "knowing if you are surrounding yourself with the right people, especially at a young age. That's why I love having my family so close to me during this process as we've made decisions together." b

LAILA!: LAILABUG PRODUCTIONS. NEWJEANS: ADOR. NAJEERIII: CATALOG. BATSON: LEXI LOVELACE.

**Contributors**

Jeff Benjamin, Kyle Denis, Angel Diaz, Griselda Flores, Lyndsey Havens, Carl Lamarre, Jason Lipshutz, Heran Mamo, Melinda Newman, Jessica Nicholson, Jessica Roiz

Tems photographed April 1 in London.

**Styling by Dunsin Wright**
David Koma coat, Emma Brewin hat, Sheertex tights, Gedebe shoes, Alighieri jewelry.

# SHE'S A VIBE

As Nigerian artist **Tems** has made history and climbed the charts, the grind and globe-trotting lifestyle that requires have sometimes threatened her preternatural calm. But as she represents her continent, she's staying true to her own voice

BY HERAN MAMO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ZOE McCONNELL

Alexandre Vauthier coat.

**ON A FRIDAY NIGHT** in late February, Tems was having dinner with the owners of San Diego FC, celebrating her new position as a partner in the MLS club. The next day, a video went viral of the 29-year-old Nigerian musician, known for her enviable levels of cool, briefly losing it while watching the club's first-ever home game, bitterly throwing her arms down when her team missed a free kick and repeatedly yelling, "What the fuck was that?" while clapping her hands to punctuate her every word. Then, on Sunday, she headed to Los Angeles for the Academy Awards, strutting the red carpet in a feathered gown at the *Vanity Fair* after-party and striking poses with the likes of H.E.R., Victoria Monét and Normani at Beyoncé and Jay-Z's annual Gold Party. By Tuesday, Tems was overseas at Paris Fashion Week, serving classic elegance while sitting front row at the Courrèges and Dior shows.

Those prime seats offered her a rare opportunity: to be off her feet and catch her breath before hopping on a jet to her next high-profile affair. Because while Tems' music has become known as the ideal soundtrack for unwinding and vibing out, she never really has time to do either.

"I'm so obsessed with the songs that I've not shared that I'm not even thinking about the outside world. I'm more concerned with the creation of the art than the acknowledgment." **—TEMS**

"Every day is something different, which is actually very exciting for me," Tems insists during an early April afternoon in her home base of London, looking laid-back in a chic "groutfit" (monochromatic gray): oversize zip-up hoodie, tank maxi dress and black leather peep toe heels, her hair slicked back in a bun with laid edges. "I'm always like, 'Hmm, I wonder how today is going to go. I wonder what's going to happen.' " But even amid her whirlwind schedule, she manages to maintain some grounding daily rituals: "In the mornings, I always do my self-care. I pray and declare that everything is going to be good and whatever comes my way, I'll be fine."

That affirmative mindset has served her well. In 2020, Wizkid featured Tems on his summer anthem "Essence," which hit the top 10 of the Billboard Hot 100 (partly due to a Justin Bieber remix); earned Tems her first Grammy Award nomination, for best global music performance; and played a pivotal role in ushering in the rise of Afrobeats in the United States. Five years later, the singer-songwriter-producer has become a global sensation in her own right, as well as a secret weapon for Western superstars. She collaborated with Drake on "Fountains" from his 2021 album, *Certified Lover Boy*, and the two appeared together the following year on Future's Hot 100 No. 1 "Wait for U," which samples Tems' 2020 track "Higher," from her debut EP, *For Broken Ears,* and earned Tems her first Grammy, for best melodic rap performance. That same year, she scored a feature on Beyoncé's *Renaissance* and co-wrote Rihanna's "Lift Me Up," from the *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* soundtrack; the song earned Golden Globe, Oscar and Grammy nods.

And since "Essence," Tems' distinguished solo releases have helped her remain at the forefront of African music. As "Wait for U" propelled "Higher," *For Broken Ears* yielded another sleeper hit in 2022, "Free Mind," which became her first solo Hot 100 entry (peaking at No. 46) and a radio fixture, spending 22 weeks at No. 1 on R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay and nine weeks atop Adult R&B Airplay. *For Broken Ears* has earned 853.7 million official on-demand U.S. streams, according to Luminate — and "Free Mind" accounts for 434 million of them.

Her A-list assists and limited but impactful solo output built expectations for Tems' first full-length, *Born in the Wild*, an 18-track opus that secured three Grammy nominations, including for best global music album, and peaked at No. 56 on the Billboard 200 following its release in June 2024 through RCA Records and Sony U.K. imprint Since '93.

"Tems is such an important voice for our times, bringing the experience of her life and music to a global audience," RCA chairman/CEO Peter Edge says. "It is so special that RCA has been able to partner with her on her journey."

Tems didn't have much faith in her chances at the Grammys, and she'd thus planned a swift exit. "I was convincing myself it's probably not me anyway. I was like, 'Let me just sit at the back. If they don't call me, I'll just quickly leave,' " she says. So when the album's jovial hit single "Love Me JeJe" won best African music performance during the awards show's premiere ceremony, she "had to run to the stage," she recalls. But she says her real "prize" that evening was witnessing the joy of her plus-one, her mother, who later spotted a certain celebrity. "She saw Will Smith and she was like, 'Will Smith, wow!' " Tems says, bursting into laughter. "He was sitting at a table and was like, 'Hey, nice to meet you!' He was talking to her. Just giving her that experience was amazing."

She has given her mom plenty more reasons to be proud this year, with an awe-inspiring series of firsts: Not only is Tems the first Nigerian artist to win two Grammys, but she's also the first African-born woman to be involved in MLS ownership and the first African female artist to hit 1 billion Spotify streams for a song, with "Wait for U." Tems can hardly keep up with them all. When I ask her where she was when she found out about her recent Spotify accomplishment, she pauses before hesitantly admitting with a laugh, "It's very possible that I'm just learning of this." But she's not taking any of her historic feats for granted: "It feels good to be able to do this on this scale. My life is a dream."

She uses the same word in "Burning," *Born in the Wild*'s other Grammy-nominated track, when describing the surreal trajectory of achieving and acclimating to her newfound fame. The extra eyeballs scrutinizing her made her feel especially "uncomfortable" in the beginning, she says, but they also proved how the tides have turned for African artists. Nigerian singer-songwriter Seyi Sodimu — who sings the 1997 Afro-soul classic "Love Me JeJe," featuring Shaffy Bello, that Tems interpolated in her Grammy-winning song of the same name — said in a 2004 interview that he pitched the original record to multiple U.S. labels, only to be told it "was hard to market me because I look 'American' but I sound 'African.' " Wale Davies, one of Tems' managers who is also one-half of the Nigerian rap duo Show Dem Camp, says "it wasn't cool to be African" back then.

But now, artists like Tems are rewriting that narrative while still honoring those who preceded them. Tems thanked Sodimu on X for clearing her song's sample: "I'm glad that it's getting its flowers today"; she also posted photos of them on the set of her self-directed "Love Me JeJe" music video, which features the two singing the bridge together.

"The responsibility an artist like Tems has is that you're going to be the portal through which people see Africa," Davies says. "We have to show them that you can operate at a global level." As she declared when accepting the Breakthrough award at Billboard Women in Music in 2024: "I'm standing with a continent behind me."

**DESPITE GROWING UP** in the "hustle and bustle" of Lagos, the artist born Témìládé Openiyi prefers peace and quiet. Today, she calls her sacred silent time her "energy-saving mode."

Tems didn't speak until she was 3 years old and found music to be a more effective means of expression. As a kid, she fell in love with the sentimental balladry and powerhouse pipes of Céline Dion, Mariah Carey and the members of Destiny's Child and says she aspired to create music with that same level of "soul and realness." But she felt insecure about her deep natural voice and opted for a more delicate falsetto. The music teacher at her secondary school, Mr. Sosan, encouraged her raw, unfiltered talent and offered his music room as a safe space. But as she honed her craft, her mother had other plans: She wanted Tems to attend college.

"I tried to miss all the deadlines, [but] she enrolled me to school in South Africa last minute," she recalls. While studying economics at IIE MSA in Johannesburg, Tems taught herself to produce and engineer her own music through YouTube tutorials. When she returned home upon graduation, she started a digital marketing job — but her real post-grad goals didn't involve sitting behind a desk.

"It just got to a point where I couldn't take it anymore... Spiritually, I was aware that this is not my path. It felt like life or death, like this can make or break your destiny and you need to make a decision right now," Tems says. "And I chose to take that leap."

HAIR BY AMIDAT GIWA AT BRYANT ARTISTS. MAKEUP BY KAYLA PEREZ USING DIOR BEAUTY. ON-SITE PRODUCTION BY JOEL GILGALLON AT JOON CREATIVE.

Tems figured once she was able to hand her mother her degree, "everyone should just leave me to be and let me do my music." And her mom, whom Tems was caring for after she had broken her leg, gave her an extra push to pursue her true passion. "We were going through a lot at the time, and we needed that job. And she said, 'I think you should go and chase your dreams and try this music thing. You can do it and I believe in you. Don't worry about me. I'm here for you,' " she remembers with tears in her eyes. Tems quit in January 2018, and that July, she independently released her debut single, "Mr Rebel," a buoyant, reflective track about standing firmly in her purpose.

"Immediately, I felt like, 'I don't know who this person is, but this person is singing for their life,' " Davies recalls of the first time he heard "Mr Rebel" soon after its release. It became an underground hit despite deviating from the feel-good, dance-driven Afrobeats popular at the time, which producers in Nigeria had always told Tems she needed to make if she ever hoped to succeed. But in the mid-2010s, the alternative *alté* movement was gaining popularity in the country, empowering a new generation of creatives to express themselves freely in their sound and style. "No one sounded like her. No one thought emotional, truthful, honest, no-filter music would work in Nigeria," Davies says. And when Tems released "Try Me" in 2019, he continues, "everything changed. That song went crazy because so many people were like, 'Ah, finally, a woman who can share our frustrations and say how we really feel.' "

"Try Me" and its gripping music video caught the attention of label executives from around the world, including Sarah Lorentzen, then an executive assistant at RCA (where she's now an A&R executive) who was dedicated to "[supporting] music from back home" in Nigeria. She flew to London in October 2019 to meet Tems, who was slated to perform at Show Dem Camp's Palmwine Festival (visa issues ultimately prevented Tems from appearing). Two months later, Lorentzen flew to Lagos for Tems' In the Garden concert. "I just jumped in and started helping her build the stage, breaking palm leaves and sticking them in the stage," she recalls. "We bonded throughout the night, and that was the start of a yearlong journey before she actually signed with RCA."

Tems' managers, Davies and Muyiwa Awoniyi, cite Lorentzen's Nigerian heritage as a key factor in their decision to sign with RCA, as well as fellow Nigerian executive Tunji Balogun, then-executive vp of A&R at RCA (now Def Jam chairman/CEO), and his crucial work with the label's Afrobeats and R&B acts. Before Lorentzen and Balogun signed Tems in 2021, they got her to hop on the Afrobeats remix of Khalid and Disclosure's dance-pop track "Know Your Worth" alongside Davido, who had signed to RCA in 2016. Wizkid, who joined the label in 2017, invited Tems through Awoniyi to a recording session for his 2020 album, *Made in Lagos*. "[Awoniyi] called me and was like, 'We're at Wiz's place, we just recorded two bangers.' And one of them ended up being 'Essence,' " Davies says.

The same weekend Tems and Wiz shot the "Essence" music video, she recorded "Me & U" with GuiltyBeatz during their first session together, in Ghana. Within a few weeks, they'd also made "Crazy Tings" and three other tracks that would appear on her first major-label EP, *If Orange Was a Place*. Music frequently flows out of Tems, who has recorded 7,000 voice memos worth of freestyled song ideas on her iPhone. ("I've saved every voice note I've ever had since 2016," she adds.) But even as "Essence" blew up globally, Tems was already focused on what was ahead. "I'm so obsessed with the songs that I've not shared that I'm not even thinking about the outside world," she says. "I'm more concerned with the creation of the art than the acknowledgment."

Lorentzen believes Tems' humble approach helps her make quality music that naturally resonates with fans. "When it comes from a pure place like that, a place without any specific intention to blow [Nigerian slang meaning "to be successful"] or for it to be a hit, it allows you to enter a different kind of flow state as an artist and really deliver what's genuine and authentic and unique to you," she says.

It helps that lightning also tends to strike right before she hits the booth. After a "lit night out" in London with her friends Dunsin Wright and Yvonne Onyanta, Tems took them back to the studio, where her producers Spax and GuiltyBeatz were making the beat for "Love Me JeJe." Guilty says he and Spax initially didn't have Sodimu's hit in mind. "She walks in the studio and literally started singing, 'Love me jeje, love me tender.' We were like, 'Yep, get on the mic and record this now,' " he recalls, adding that "Love Me JeJe" was the "easiest song" to make on *Born in the Wild*, taking under an hour to finish.

Kayla Jackson, then Tems' project manager at RCA (and now marketing consultant), proposed debuting it during her set at the 2024 Coachella festival, where fans at the Mojave Tent instantly picked up on the nostalgic call-and-response track. For Guilty, the crowd's reaction "reconfirmed what I believe — and that is whatever feeling you have while making music in the studio is going to translate to people."

> "The responsibility an artist like Tems has is that you're going to be the portal through which people see Africa. We have to show them you can operate at a global level."
>
> **—WALE DAVIES, CO-MANAGER**

**DO YOU KNOW** this song?"

Tems is surveying the front row of New York's Radio City Music Hall, searching for a lucky someone to serenade with a freestyle based off their name, as she did during every stop of the 2024 *Born in the Wild* world tour. Her security guard lifts a 9-year-old girl, coincidentally named Africa, onto the stage as "Found," the Brent Faiyaz-featuring track from *If Orange Was a Place*, starts playing. Tems asks her a couple of times if she knows this song before she shyly nods her head and proceeds to surprise the singer — and 6,000 concertgoers — by not missing a single lyric.

"Everybody erupted," Joe Harris, her agent at CAA, remembers from that night. "In that moment, I realized this woman has not only been able to touch people her age and older, but the youth of the world has fallen in love with her voice and her tone."

And her team has made sure her voice can travel to as many corners of the planet as possible, especially on her native continent. When Tems originally announced her 31-date international tour last May, she had two unspecified African stops scheduled. Awoniyi says it's difficult to find the right venues that will "match the standard" of the kind of show she wants to deliver, and Harris adds, "It takes a bit of groundwork to try to pull those shows together because of the infrastructure and politically whatever's going on in each one of those different countries." In January, after receiving backlash online for promoting her show in Kigali, Rwanda, that was scheduled for March, Tems canceled it due to the country's ongoing conflict with the Democratic Republic of Congo. "I never ever intend to be insensitive to real-world issues, and I sincerely apologize if this came across that way," she wrote on X.

But aside from occasional roadblocks, she has also secured major opportunities in Africa. In March, Tems became the first artist to perform at The Dome, the new, 10,500-capacity venue in Johannesburg that Live Nation launched with Stadium Management South Africa and Gearhouse South Africa earlier this year. "We're always looking to create epic moments," Awoniyi says. "Live Nation let us know about the venue that they were building. Our agents spoke to them, and because we are very moments-focused, for her to be the first artist to perform there is cool." Her team is carefully planning on rescheduling her show in Rwanda while adding new stops in Kenya, Ghana and, of course, Nigeria.

Bringing the fruits of her success back home remains fundamental to Tems' mission. Pave Investments — an African private investment firm that backs platforms creating opportunities to develop and support African talent globally, such as Tems' company, The Leading Vibe — reached out to her camp with the opportunity to join the San Diego FC ownership group. "I grew up around my uncles and brother watching matches, and because they're so loud, I'm forced to pay attention. I always wondered about being able to be in the business of it because it's a man's world," Tems says.

Marc Jacobs jacket and shoes,
Calzedonia tights, Jacquemus earrings.

In her role, she'll work closely with the Right To Dream Academy, a youth association football academy that started in Ghana and has since expanded with branches in Egypt, Denmark and the United States. "That's something that piqued my interest, being able to build other Africans up, build other children up and give them more opportunities that they wouldn't have otherwise seen," Tems says.

Her historic entrance into the sports realm aligns with the ethos of The Leading Vibe, which she established in 2020 and where she serves as a director. Named for a lyric from "Mr Rebel" — "I'm the crown, I'm the vibe, I'm the leading vibe" — it allows her to "[lead] by example" and make a "difference in the world" by holding and managing her assets (she fully owns her masters for *For Broken Ears* and co-owns the masters for *If Orange Was a Place* and *Born in the Wild*) while serving as an incubator for investment, philanthropy and new business ventures. Through The Leading Vibe, she's working on an initiative to support young African female artists, songwriters and producers.

"The way her brand is constructed is not limiting. You can see her at a football match today, you can see her at Formula 1 tomorrow," Awoniyi says. In February, Aston Martin reported that 15,000 people

> “This woman has not only been able to touch people her age and older, but the youth of the world has fallen in love with her voice and her tone.”
>
> **—JOE HARRIS, CAA**

Ferragamo dress, Christian Louboutin shoes, Justine Clenquet earrings, Mi Manera ring.

watched her perform “Higher” at the unveiling of its new car design for the 2025 F1 season at London’s O2 Arena. She’s yet to headline her own show at the famed venue, but Awoniyi says they “haven’t been trying to rush” her growth as an artist to ensure the longevity of her career.

Tems says she’s currently making music “that I’m really excited about that sounds nothing like *Born in the Wild*,” and that after contributing to the *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* soundtrack, she wants to hear more of her music in film — maybe even in the form of an original score — and possibly get in front of the camera. But while her universe may be continually expanding, Tems still wants her impact on the world to be fulfilling.

“My 20s, they’ve been eventful. I’ve gotten used to the uncertainty,” says Tems, who turns 30 in June. “I hope it stays that way. I hope it doesn’t slow down.” **b**

*Tems will headline THE STAGE at SXSW London on June 5 in an exclusive concert presented by* Billboard *at London’s iconic music venue Troxy.*

# ANEW

J-hope photographed April 7
in Los Angeles.

**Styling by Youngjin Kim**
Louis Vuitton jacket, pants and shoes;
Audemars Piguet watch.

With his groundbreaking solo tour and new singles, **j-hope** is forging a deeper connection with fans, expanding his own path beyond BTS and looking toward even bigger milestones ahead

# HOPE

■ BY BILLBOARD KOREA ■ PHOTOGRAPHED BY JULIAN DAKDOUK

Louis Vuitton shirt, jacket and pants; Audemars Piguet watch.

**BEST KNOWN AS A DANCER, RAPPER AND** singer-songwriter in BTS, j-hope has long stood out, with a magnetic stage presence and captivating dance moves that helped propel the group to global stardom. Now — as ARMY around the world anticipate the group's remaining members completing South Korea's mandatory military service and BTS reuniting in June, with group activities on hold until 2026 — the charismatic 31-year-old is distinguishing himself further, carving out a bold solo identity that showcases a versatility and creative range that extend far beyond his BTS persona.

Following his 2022 debut solo album, *Jack in the Box*, which peaked at No. 6 on the Billboard 200, and his 2024 *Hope on the Street, Vol. 1* EP that rose to No. 5 on the chart, j-hope has already released collaborations this year with stars including Miguel, Don Toliver and Pharrell Williams. And with his Hope on the Stage World Tour, which kicked off Feb. 28 in Seoul, j-hope is reaching new heights: His show at Los Angeles' BMO Stadium made him the first South Korean male solo artist to headline a U.S. stadium. (His bandmate Jin will hit the road this summer.) The tour — which will wrap June 1 after visiting 15 markets across North America and Asia, including a May 31 show in Osaka, Japan, that will be broadcast live to cinemas around the world — has mirrored his own artistic growth as he prepares for the next stage of his solo journey with his upcoming album. J-hope sat down with *Billboard Korea* in Los Angeles for an exclusive chat about his music, touring and inspirations.

> **"MOVING FORWARD, I WANT TO KEEP CREATING AUTHENTIC PERFORMANCES THAT UNITE EVERYONE THROUGH THE POWER OF MUSIC."**

**What does it mean to you to be on the cover of *Billboard* as a solo artist?**
Growing up, *Billboard* seemed like a completely different universe to me. I'd follow the charts to see where my favorite artists landed, and that's how I got a sense of the era's musical flow and what sounds were defining each moment. So having my own music recognized by *Billboard* still feels surreal and exciting. To me, *Billboard* remains a dreamlike presence, and the amazing thing is, that dream is still unfolding, much like my song, "Sweet Dreams."

**You're widely regarded as a symbol of hope — not only for your fans, but also for many Asian artists globally. How does it feel to have that kind of impact?**
Just as I drew inspiration from the artists I admired growing up, shaping my own music through their influence, I'd be honored if my work could inspire others and pass on that same positive energy — that would mean the world to me. Above all, I hope to continue growing into an artist who brings light and encouragement to others wherever I go.

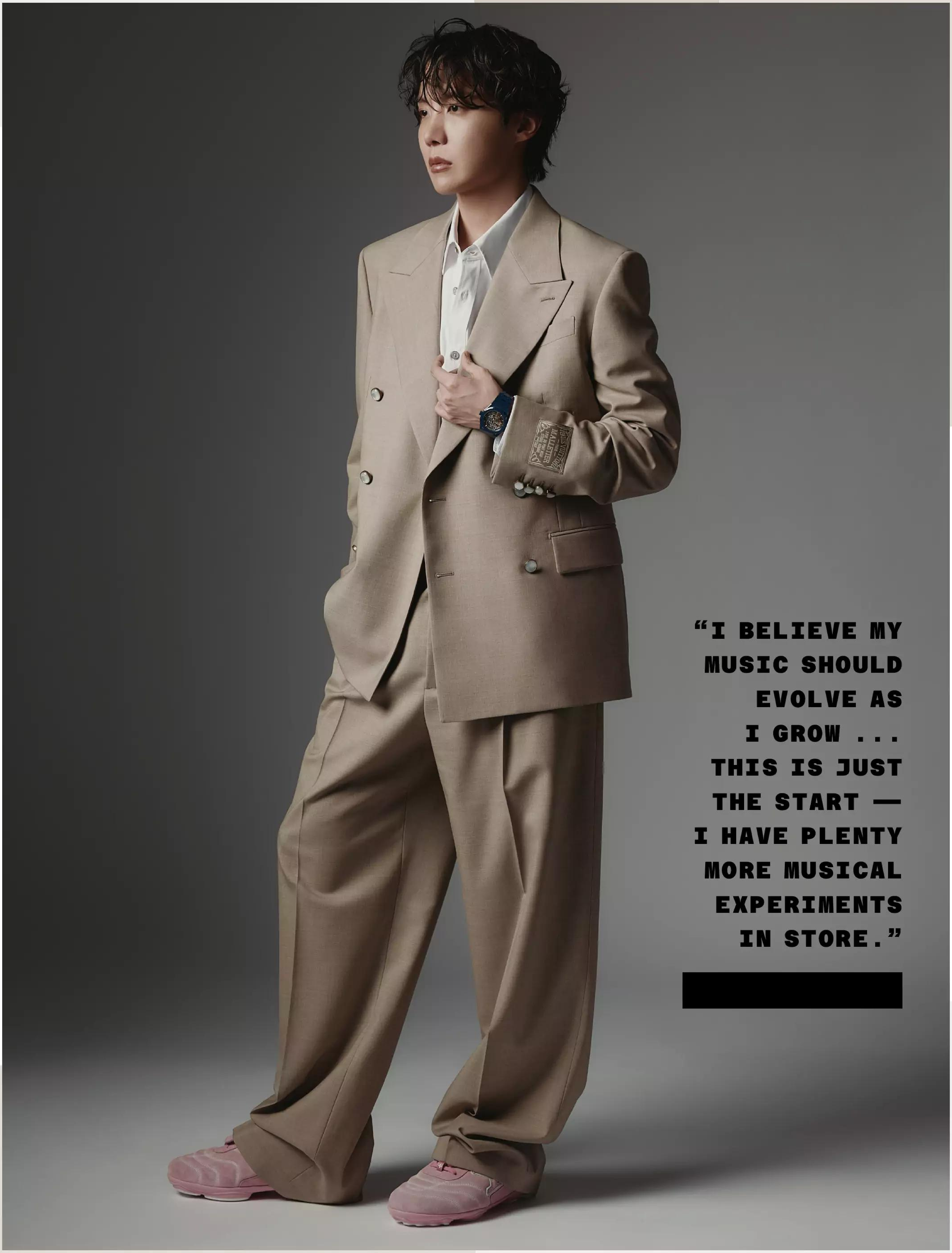
**Is there a particular message you want to convey with this tour?**
Embracing my identity as j-hope, I found myself reflecting more deeply on the true essence of hope. I realized it's not something to be taken lightly, so I wanted to channel that sincerity into my music and bring it to life through Hope on the Stage, sharing it with as many people as possible. I was hands-on with everything — stage design, choreography, fashion and even the props — pouring my heart into every aspect. I hope the audience left with a sense of genuine positivity and inspiration. Moving forward, I want to keep creating authentic performances that unite everyone through the power of music.

**You made history in April as the first South Korean male solo artist to headline a U.S. stadium. How did that feel?**
Having performed at countless stadiums with BTS, I was always part of a seven-member team filling the stage. This time, I was on my own, and honestly, I wondered if I could handle that immense energy and pressure by myself. But I pulled it off and that means a lot to me — it's a milestone I'll always cherish.

**You're often hailed as a fashion icon. What ignited your love of style?**
Ever since I was young, I've had a genuine passion for clothes. I don't really see myself as a fashionista — I just have a deep, genuine love for fashion. To me, clothing is a powerful way to express my identity. Even during BTS world tours, I'd make time to visit local boutiques and explore different styles, which really helped shape my personal aesthetic over time. For my solo world tour, I handpicked every outfit for each performance, ensuring every look was distinct. I believe my approach to fashion adds a fun, dynamic element for fans to enjoy while watching my shows.

**Your recent single, "Mona Lisa," debuted at No. 65 on the Billboard Hot 100 and was released in March two weeks after your Miguel collaboration, "Sweet Dreams." What's the story behind these tracks?**
I believe my music should evolve as I grow. Before my enlistment, I leaned into my roots in dance, experimenting with a variety of sounds to express different facets of myself. But just a week after my discharge, I headed straight to the U.S. because I wanted to explore how the American producers I admire would interpret my sound. "Sweet Dreams" featuring Miguel — an artist I've long respected — has a smooth, soulful vibe that feels deeply personal. On the other hand, "Mona Lisa" brings a hip-hop-driven performance energy. Both tracks are easy to connect with, yet they offer a glimpse into the broader, more evolved musical world I'm building. This is just the start — I have plenty more musical experiments in store. ■

HAIR BY NAEJOO PARK. MAKEUP BY DAREUM KIM. CREATIVE DIRECTION BY BILLBOARD KOREA. PRODUCTION BY ARTCODED.



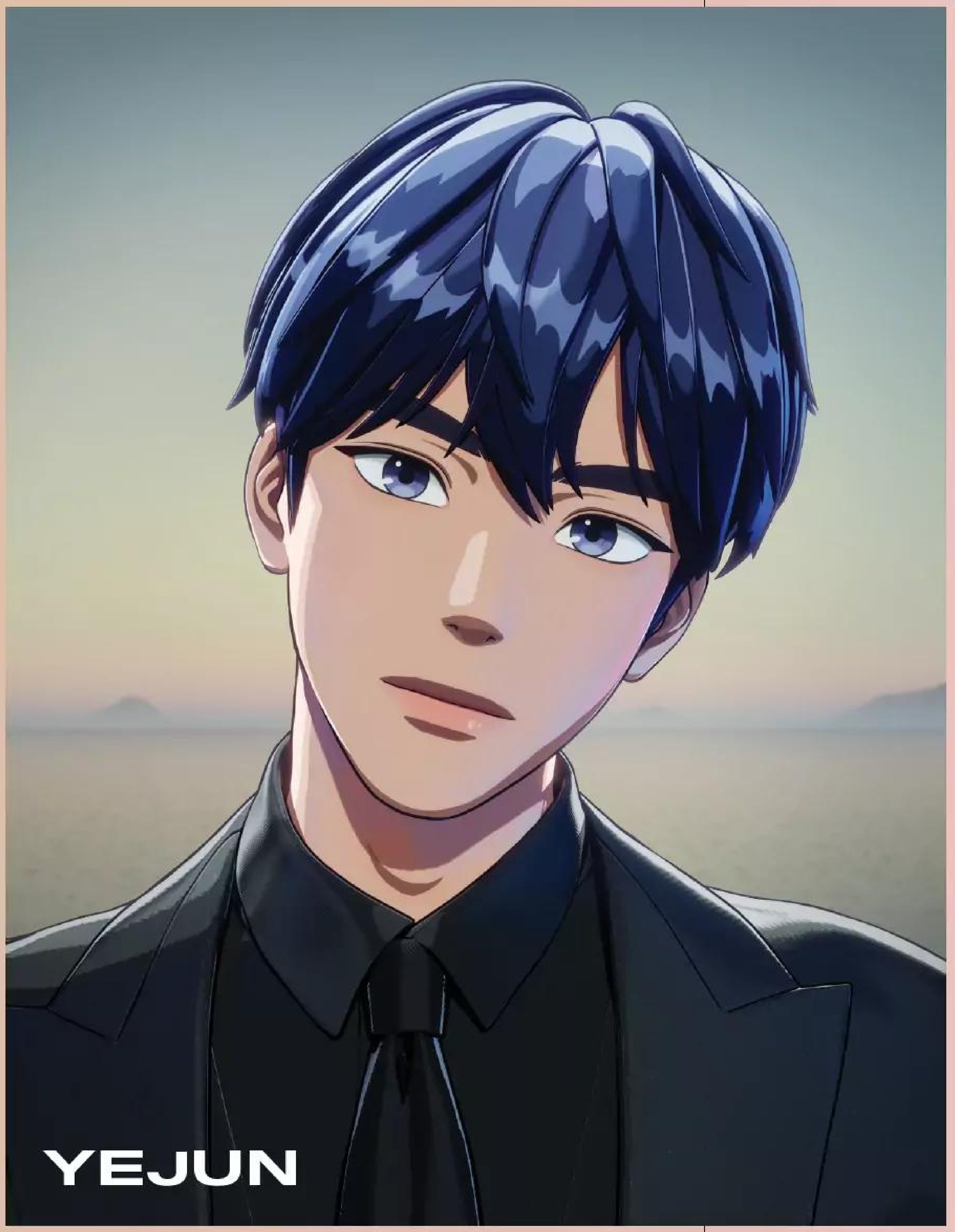
“I BELIEVE MY MUSIC SHOULD EVOLVE AS I GROW ... THIS IS JUST THE START — I HAVE PLENTY MORE MUSICAL EXPERIMENTS IN STORE.”

# BEHIND THE SCREENS

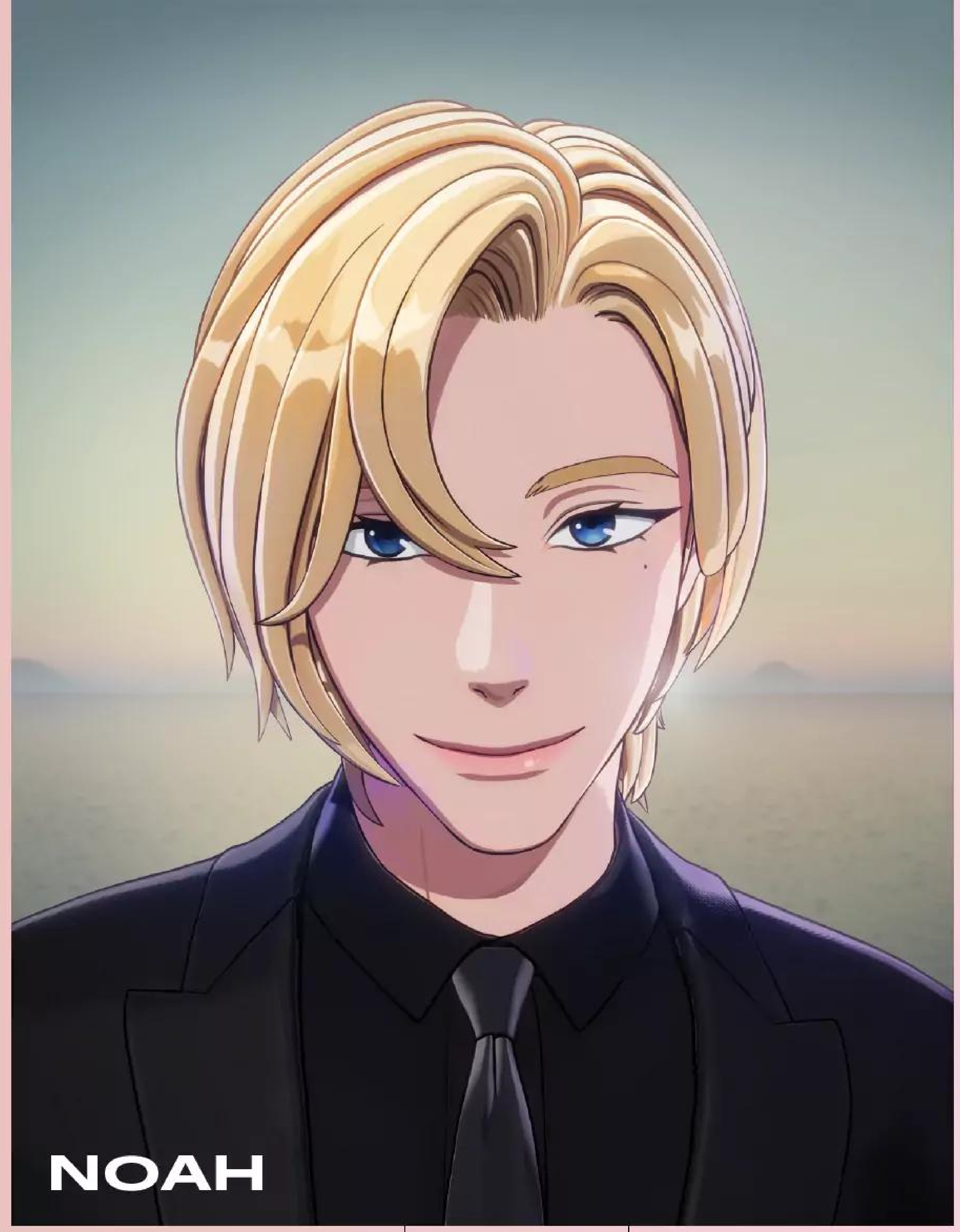
This is no glitch in the matrix: **PLAVE**, a virtual K-pop band, is proving that after decades of attempts, singing and dancing avatars can move tickets, albums and fans

BY JEFF BENJAMIN

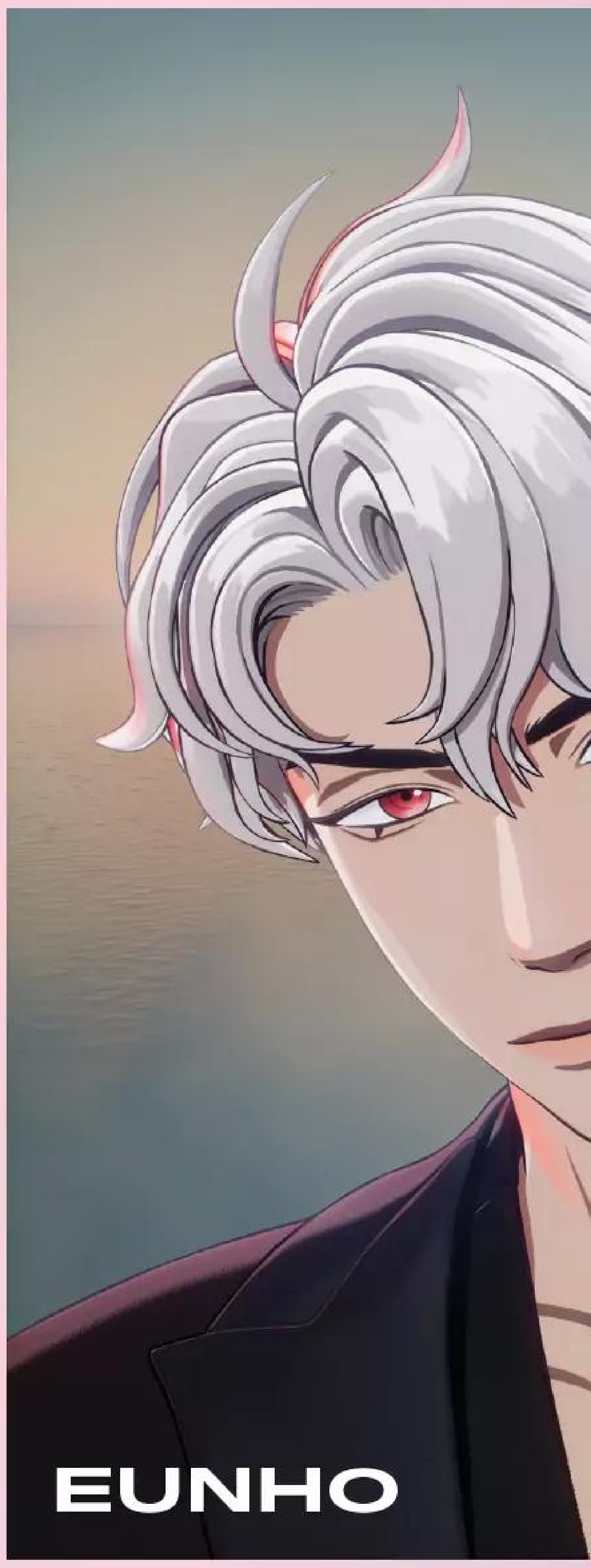
The avatars of PLAVE, from left: Yejun, Eunho, Noah, Bamby and Hamin.



YEJUN



NOAH



EUNHO

**ON APRIL 13,** the Circle Chart — South Korea's longest-running music ranking, and its equivalent to the RIAA — unveiled its latest musician milestones. Alongside accomplishments by Blackpink's Jisoo, NewJeans and BTS, stood PLAVE — a boy band whose members' real-life identities are hidden behind digital avatars, but whose commercial performance and ambitions rival K-pop's biggest human acts.

For almost three decades, Korean music companies have attempted to develop cyber singers, with mixed results. But none have broken through like PLAVE, which with its third mini-album, February's *Caligo Pt. 1*, became the first entirely virtual Korean act to surpass 1 million units sold, according to Circle Chart. But much like Gorillaz — the virtual British band created by Damon Albarn and Jamie Hewlett — the members of PLAVE are, behind the screens that project their avatars, real artists proving they can have real impact without revealing their faces or personal lives.

PLAVE was conceptualized in the unassuming Seoul office building that houses VLAST, an entertainment company that started as a for-hire computer graphics studio and is now a full-service production house for real-time graphics and virtual intellectual property that also provides label and management services to PLAVE, which is currently its sole musical group. Inside its scrappy yet cutting-edge production facility, and under CEO Lee "William" Sunggoo's direction, the company imagined a virtual band in the style of *manhwa*, the Korean comics and webtoons that have become increasingly popular over the past two decades thanks in part to the otherworldly good looks of their characters. After successfully pitching the potential of virtual artists to the singer who would go on to voice PLAVE leader Yejun, VLAST recruited four more artists to round out the quintet as Bamby, Noah, Eunho and Hamin. "Each new member was recommended by someone who recognized their musical ability," Lee says.

According to VLAST, the men behind PLAVE are all artists who previously pursued K-pop or R&B careers. Their virtual selves — brought to life in meticulous 2D detail through motion-capture rendering — sing, dance and rap like any K-pop stars would. But the real men of PLAVE also write, produce, choreograph and play instruments on tracks, a level of creative involvement usually seen in chart-toppers like BTS and Stray Kids that's still atypical among idol groups.

At VLAST's Seoul headquarters, creative teams huddle around screens, monitors and camera rigs, overseeing motion-capture stages and ensuring the PLAVE avatars and the actual musicians in the room with them have every dance move and facial expression synced. Through real-time animation, PLAVE can host frequent livestreams with fans and play concerts and festival appearances — so long as venues have a screen to display them.

The quintet's real members can even see its fans — known as PLLI — as it performs from inside VLAST HQ and respond directly to them. So far, the group has headlined four concerts with in-person audiences, all in Seoul: First, it sold out two April 2024 shows at the city's 2,500-seat Olympic Hall, then two dates the following October at the 11,000-capacity Jamsil Indoor Stadium, according to VLAST. In a review of the latter, the *Korea JoongAng Daily* lauded onscreen feats like watching PLAVE "driving a burning motorcycle to the stage," but noted that the band's inability to actually meet its audience "greatly limits the range of performance," while technical glitches jolted fans from the fantasy.

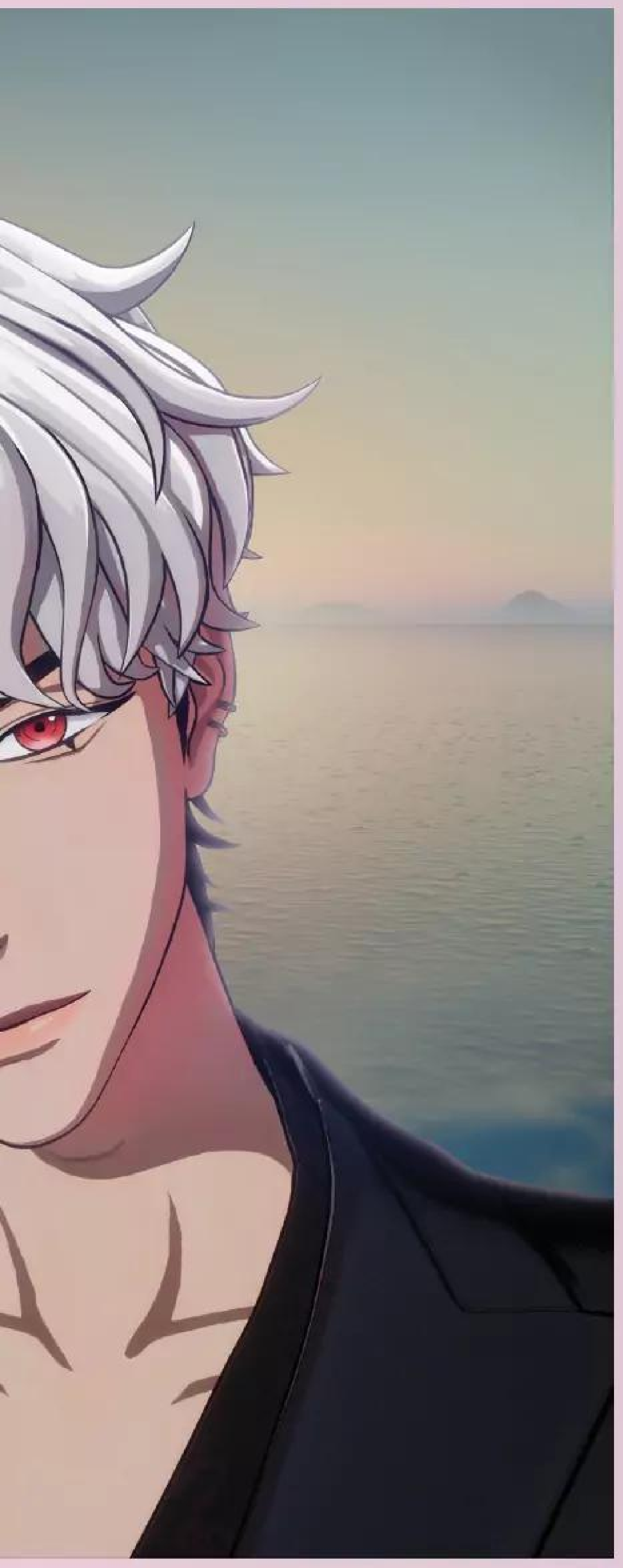
("We are always committed to delivering the best possible results," VLAST says. "Enhancing PLAVE's concert experience involves upgrading every element that allows the audience to feel fully immersed and connected — including minimizing technical issues.")

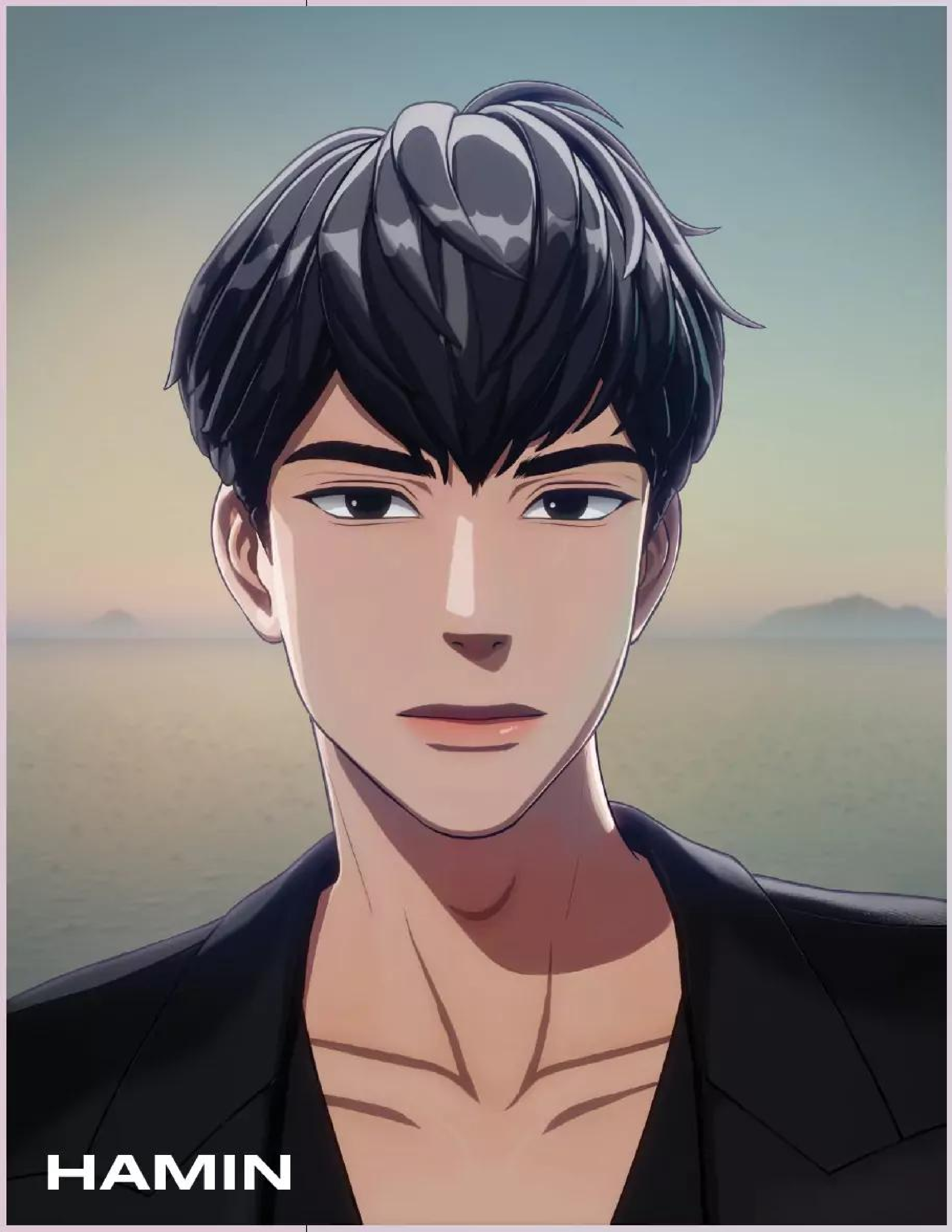
"PLLI are the kinds of fans who truly see the real us," Bamby tells *Billboard* in a video interview. At 5 foot 9, he's PLAVE's shortest member and sports pink hair and magenta eyes. (Whether these avatars' attributes are in any way directly inspired by the people voicing them remains a secret.) Because of PLAVE's virtual nature, Bamby continues, "We rely even more on communication platforms. We're constantly curious about how they're doing and how they're experiencing our content."

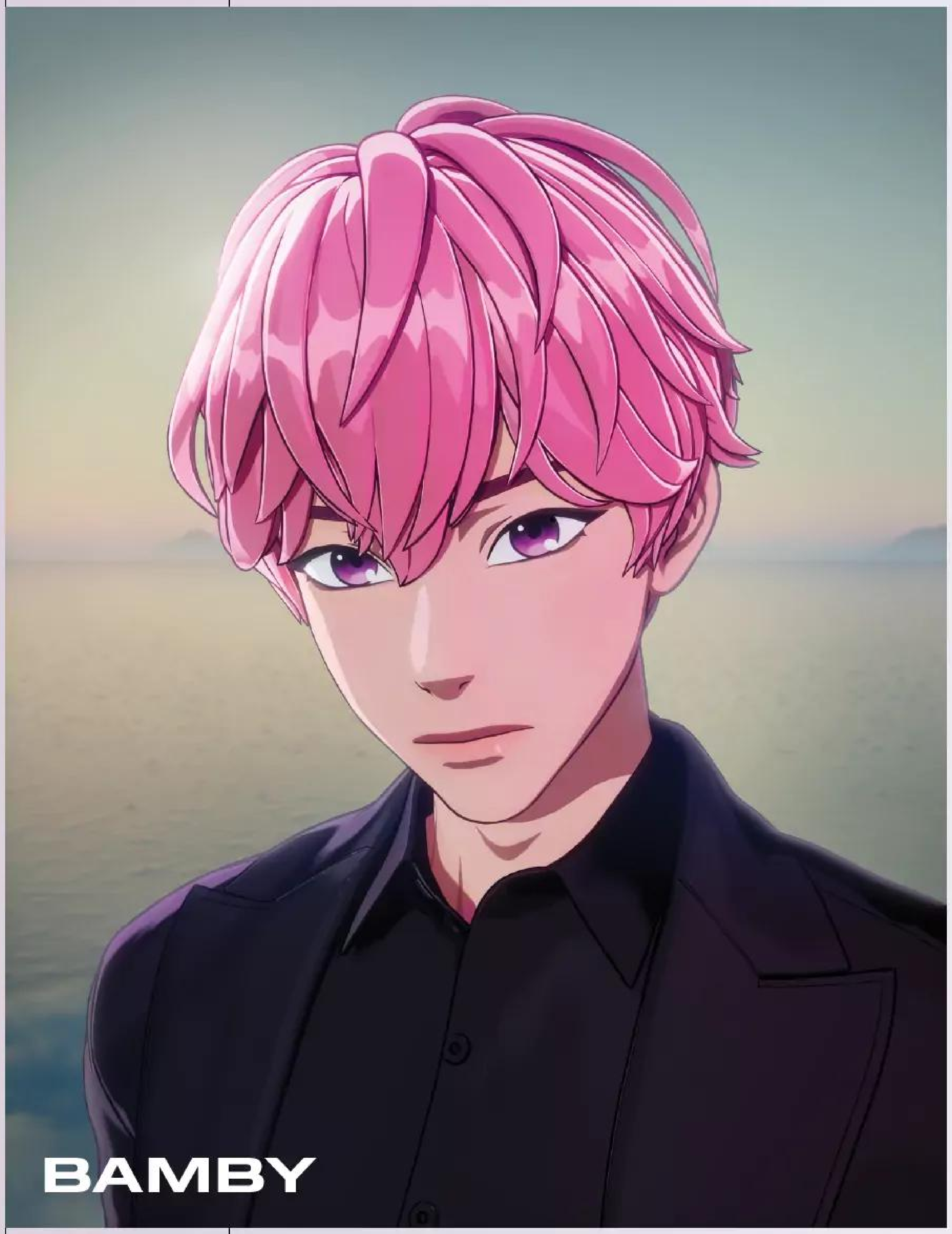
Since its March 2023 debut, PLAVE has earned more than 2.1 billion official on-demand global streams, according to Luminate. Before its latest single, "Dash," became the first song by a Korean virtual group to reach the Billboard Global 200 in February 2025, PLAVE had entered the Global 200 Excl. U.S. chart with "Pump Up the Volume!" and "Way 4 Luv."

PLAVE joins a long history of virtual acts from Asia. In the mid-1990s, Japan pioneered virtual idols; the first from South Korea was Adam, a *Sims*-like cyber singer from information technology company Adamsoft who "debuted" in 1998 and whose first album, *Genesis*, sold a reported 200,000 copies. Adam led a small boom of cyber stars, but corporations ultimately abandoned them as costs exceeded earnings.

Virtual artists began making a comeback at the start of the 2020s after artificial intelligence and metaverse technology trends helped launch groups like Mave:, an AI-powered female quartet that virtual-artist management house Metaverse Entertainment launched in 2023. Korea's Kakao Entertainment invested a reported







12 billion won (about $9.7 million at the time) in a partnership with Metaverse. While Mave: is strictly operated through technology, other groups with real humans behind virtual facades like PLAVE now exist, including female sextet Isegye Idol and 11-member girl group Itterniti. But none have broken through with significant sales or awards recognition like PLAVE.

"The initial investment is substantial," Lee says. "But once that foundation is in place, there are certain advantages. Unlike traditional artists, we don't have costs for things like hair, makeup or long-distance travel. Instead, our resources are directed toward technology, creative development and content production."

PLAVE's rapid ascent has attracted financial investment from HYBE and YG Entertainment, which double as strategic advisers on everything from the members' vocal health to global rollout strategy. "As a company new to the entertainment industry, we valued getting advice and insights from established industry leaders with extensive experience," Lee says. With global distribution from YG PLUS, *Caligo Pt. 1* included the group's first all-English track, "Island" (co-written by Adrian McKinnon, whose credits range from Rae Sremmurd to ENHYPEN). On June 16, PLAVE will release its debut Japanese single, "Kakurenbo (Hide and Seek)," following a 2024 agreement with HYBE Japan to support PLAVE's expansion in the market.

"From an international fan's point of view, it can sometimes be hard to fully grasp the emotions we want to express due to language barriers," says PLAVE's Eunho, who appears as a silver-haired rapper with fangs. "Some feelings just don't translate perfectly, so we're really glad we got to release an English track this time. We believe it helped us connect more deeply with our fans in English-speaking countries, and we plan to keep exploring multilingual projects."

For now, VLAST has no plans for developing further virtual artists, focusing its energies entirely on PLAVE. Its current goals for the group include upgrading the concert experience, launching a dedicated mobile app, pushing to "reach more global fans" — including in Western markets — "and introduce them to what virtual artists can offer," according to Lee.

> **"We believe that high-quality music and performance are what distinguish us from other virtual artists. Creating compelling music is always one of our top priorities."**
>
> —LEE "WILLIAM" SUNGGOO, VLAST

"The biggest misconception we faced was that virtual idols like PLAVE were fully operated by AI," he adds. "Even now, in some overseas markets where people aren't yet familiar with PLAVE, that remains a common misunderstanding."

As with so many ascendant pop stars, the real men behind PLAVE have faced their share of privacy invasion. Prying online fans have unearthed clues to the members' real-life identities; last year, some began stalking them at VLAST and their homes, despite the company's pleas for fans to respect PLAVE's privacy and subsequent threat of legal action toward anyone disclosing personal information about the act. When rumors regarding the members' real identities ran wild across social media and online forums around *Caligo Pt. 1*'s release, neither the band nor VLAST responded.

The group's navy-haired, silver-eyed leader, Yejun, promises that in the coming year, "Fans will see us onstage a lot more. Up until now, we've had relatively few chances to perform live. In 2025, we want to change that — more concerts and more global tours." (In early May, PLAVE announced three August dates at Seoul's KPSO Dome.)

"All five members of PLAVE are passionate about music," Lee explains. "We believe that high-quality music and performance are what distinguish us from other virtual artists. Creating compelling music is always one of our top priorities."

"Our chemistry as a group, our direct communication with fans and our distinct musical identity are what have brought us this far," the black-haired, black-eyed rapper Hamin says. Adds Yejun: "The bond we share as members — the connection, the stories we've built and the trust between us — that's what makes PLAVE special." b

CREATIVE DIRECTION BY BILLBOARD KOREA. PRODUCTION BY BILLBOARD KOREA + VLAST.

Doechii (left) and Tiffith photographed by Sami Drasin on March 29 at YouTube Theater in Los Angeles.

# 40 UNDER 40

SAVVY MANAGERS, SKILLED MARKETERS AND LIVE LEADERS HIGHLIGHT *BILLBOARD*'S ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF THE MUSIC INDUSTRY'S TALENTED YOUNG EXECUTIVES

## Anthony "Moosa" Tiffith

**PRESIDENT**

**TOP DAWG ENTERTAINMENT**

**IN THE MIDDLE OF HIS** Grammy Award-winning 2024 "Not Like Us" music video, Kendrick Lamar posts up with OG executives and artists from his former label, Top Dawg Entertainment, on the patchy lawn outside of the Nickerson Gardens housing projects in Los Angeles' Watts neighborhood. "That moment for me was strong and powerful because here we are, still laughing, joking, like when we were these 16-, 17-year-old kids back in the day," TDE president Anthony "Moosa" Tiffith recalls. "It feels good when you and all your brothers set out to do something, and then you see everybody succeed at exactly what we set out to do. We all come from one frat, and that's TDE."

Moosa, now 37, was introduced to not only this brotherhood but also the broader music business by watching rappers and other creatives including Lamar, ScHoolboy Q, Ab-Soul, Jay Rock, Derek "MixedByAli" Ali and Sounwave pull up to the recording studio, dubbed House of Pain, that his father, TDE CEO Anthony "Top Dawg" Tiffith, built in the backyard of their Carson, Calif., home in 1997. "Music has always been around my family," he says, citing his great-uncle Michael Concepcion, who managed R&B singer Rome and produced the West Coast Rap All-Stars' 1990 Grammy-nominated single "We're All in the Same Gang." Moosa clicked with ScHoolboy Q and became his road manager in 2011, then eventually "fell into" being his overall manager.

Through the years, he stepped up at the label and his responsibilities increased. "Sometimes you're getting prepped for something that's much bigger than you," he says. In 2022, Moosa was elevated to co-president alongside Terrence "Punch" Henderson and tasked with overseeing TDE's day-to-day operations on top of managing some of its artists, such as Doechii, ScHoolboy Q, Zacari, Alemeda and in-house producer Kal Banx. "Sometimes I'm in my A&R bag, and then sometimes I'm in a creative bag where I'm overseeing a rollout," he says.

TDE, which celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2024, remains committed to its artists' long-term growth and creative autonomy — fostering groundbreaking output that's often well worth the wait. In March 2024, ScHoolboy Q released *Blue Lips*, his first studio album in five years, to critical acclaim. And the following August, Doechii released her third mixtape, *Alligator Bites Never Heal*, which earned the fast-rising star a best new artist Grammy nod and her first Grammy trophy, for best rap album, while yielding two Billboard Hot 100 hits: "Denial Is a River" (which peaked at No. 21) and "Nissan Altima" (No. 73). When Doechii released the mixtape's extended edition in March, she included "Anxiety," which hit No. 10, becoming her highest-peaking entry on the chart.

Those achievements represent just some of the widespread recognition Doechii has quickly garnered, from being named Woman of the Year at Billboard Women in Music to winning outstanding music artist at the GLAAD Media Awards. And Moosa played a crucial role in the rise of TDE's latest star: "This is a project I personally signed, curated, put producers around, put directors around. It feels that much more personal to me with her winning that Grammy," he reflects. "I knew all the accolades would come, just not the timing of them."

Moosa has been steadily developing Doechii for the last five years, since one of his young employees sent him a list of artists to check out that included her. He listened to Doechii's dynamic, autobiographical single "Yucky Blucky Fruitcake" and found himself going down a "big rabbit hole" online that included discovering a video of her "doing choreo with two dancers next to her with probably 10 people in the club," he remembers. "It let me know how serious she took herself. She had a vision right there, probably with no money." While Doechii's vision now occasionally demands the big bucks — like her high-concept 2025 Grammy performance — Moosa believes she's worth banking on: "I got this little saying between me and my general manager, Keaton [Smith]: 'She hasn't missed yet.' "

Moosa and Doechii have a "super-collaborative and intentional working process," he explains. He has also been inspired by the relationship between Henderson and SZA, who this year has already topped the Billboard 200 (when *SOS*' deluxe *LANA* edition reinstated it at the top of the chart) and Hot 100 (with Lamar collaboration "Luther," which she and the rapper performed at this year's Super Bowl halftime show) and starred in her first feature film, the acclaimed buddy comedy *One of Them Days*. "These are the things that I want to build with me and Doechii, [putting] her in positions to have that same sort of impact," he adds.

And even as TDE celebrates the successes of SZA and Doechii, Moosa remains dedicated to maintaining the storied label's cultural impact and building up its burgeoning, boundary-pushing acts. Rapper Ray Vaughn released his debut mixtape, *The Good the Bad the Dollar Menu*, in April, and Alemeda's 2024 debut EP, *FK IT*, showcased her indie/alt-pop sound, a departure from the label's rap and R&B bedrock. "When you look across our roster, I try not to sign anybody that's extremely similar to each other. I'm always looking beyond one or two genres," Moosa says, adding that he also looks for "authenticity, discipline, work ethic and family dynamics" in new signees. "Every artist that we get, we treat them like family. It's going to be a close-knit type of thing because that's how we all came up."

—HERAN MAMO

## Annie Aberle

SENIOR VP/ HEAD OF CREATIVE

**PULSE MUSIC GROUP**

The 31-year-old Aberle, who was promoted to her current role last year, understands the anatomy of a hit song. Through her quest to help artists craft music that is "so deeply personal that it is inevitably universal," she and Pulse's major wins have included Beyoncé's Grammy Award-winning *Cowboy Carter*, which featured contributions from Pulse clients Ryan Beatty, Jack Rochon, Jean Dawson and Tyler Johnson — the lattermost of whom also worked on recent long-running Hot 100 No. 1s by Harry Styles ("As It Was") and Miley Cyrus ("Flowers").

**The best concert I've seen is** "Rosalía's set at Coachella 2023 rewired my brain chemistry."

## Steve Ackles

GLOBAL TOUR PROMOTER

**LIVE NATION**

"My goal is to serve as a trustworthy architect of an artist's touring plan, from start to finish, and through all the ups and downs that come with that journey," says Ackles, who has recently booked tours for blink-182, Megan Thee Stallion and Avril Lavigne, among others. Blink-182 support act Pierce the Veil drew huge audiences that propelled it to its own amphitheater and arena dates this year, which the 35-year-old Ackles is also promoting and calls "a 'perfect storm' moment" for the band and its team.

**The best advice I've received is** " 'Always be the least important person in the room.' It's served as a reminder that significant growth, whether professional or personal, rarely comes from existing within your comfort zone."

## Ethan Berlin

PARTNER/AGENT

**ARRIVAL ARTISTS**

Since launching in October 2020 with six partners and two employees, Arrival has expanded its staff to more than 40 — and its clients have enjoyed similar growth. Berlin steers the exploding live careers of psych-funk trio Khruangbin and jam-rockers Goose (with Arrival's John Bongiorno and Karl Morse, respectively); both have never been more successful on the road, with the former staging two-night runs in 2024 at Queens' Forest Hills Stadium, Colorado's Red Rocks Amphitheatre and Los Angeles' Hollywood Bowl, and the latter making its Madison Square Garden headlining debut this June. Says the 36-year-old: "There is room [on the road] for nearly every type of act/genre to experience monumental success."

**The best concert I've seen is** "Phish, Nassau Coliseum, Feb. 28, 2003."

## Erin Calhoun

VP OF LIVE

**SPHERE ENTERTAINMENT**

As the on-site lead for bookings at the globally known Las Vegas venue, Calhoun, 38, manages day-to-day operations with artist teams — from content development to scheduling — and helps them harness the boundary-pushing facility's potential. Since opening in September 2023, Sphere has hosted runs by U2, the Eagles, Dead & Company, Phish and Anyma, with country icon Kenny Chesney, pop royalty Backstreet Boys and a collaborative show by dance promoters Insomniac and Tomorrowland up next. Says Calhoun: "Innovation is required every single day."

**If I wasn't working in the music business, I would be** "I was never not going to be in music — that wasn't an option."

## Brita Christensen

VP OF GLOBAL ARTIST AND PROMOTER RELATIONS

**TICKETMASTER**

A Ticketmaster veteran of nearly a decade, Christensen is currently "focused on bringing our artist and promoter relations under one roof and growing the team to meet the demand from touring acts who need scalable support across markets." To wit: Last year, Ticketmaster expanded by 20%, launched 1,400 tours globally and led worldwide concert on-sales for scores of major artists. "It's been a massive effort," says Christensen, 31, "and a big part of it has been making sure we're not just keeping up with the pace of global touring, but really helping artists connect with fans in more meaningful ways."

**The best concert I've seen is** "Stevie Nicks at BST Hyde Park with my mom."

## Ainsley Daigle

VP OF FIREBIRD ARTIST MANAGEMENT

**FIREBIRD**

"Artists have never had more power and opportunity to really take ownership of their careers," says Daigle, 34. However, "building long-term, sustainable careers is hard, and it requires patience, tenacity, strategic vision and focus." That's why her work at Firebird focuses on developing relationships and strategies with management partners — like JET and Hills, which joined Firebird last year — so that they can help artists build "longer-lasting, more impactful and, ultimately, more profitable careers."

**Ten years ago, I was** "A research assistant in the Division of Financial Stability at the Federal Reserve Board — big career pivot."

ABERLE: EVAN WOODS. ACKLES: SEAN BEHR. BERLIN: COURTESY OF ARRIVAL ARTISTS. CALHOUN: RICH FURY/SPHERE ENTERTAINMENT. CHRISTENSEN: COURTESY OF TICKETMASTER. DAIGLE: COURTESY OF FIREBIRD.

## Alex DePersia

FOUNDER/ARTIST MANAGER

**BY THE WAY**

Before making decisions for her clients, DePersia asks herself: "Is this going to help them share their voice in the way they want to?" That mentality has guided the 37-year-old manager, previously across six-plus years at Laffitte Management Group, where she was a member of Pharrell Williams' core team, and now at her own, new company, By the Way, where she's continued her work steering the career of pop breakout Gracie Abrams, whose smash 2024 album, *The Secret of Us*, has propelled her to headlining arenas for the first time. "As a manager you wear a lot of hats," she says, "but the baseline of it all is being a partner and championing the artist."

**The best concert I've seen is** "Rihanna. Literally, anything Rihanna."

## Ryan Donahue

SENIOR MANAGING DIRECTOR, FINANCE AND OPERATIONS

**MUSICARES**

Donahue bridges the daily operations of the Recording Academy's philanthropic nonprofit with its long-term vision of serving musicians in need — and in January, when many colleagues and artists were affected by the devastating L.A. wildfires, the 38-year-old was a driving force behind MusiCares' expansive response efforts, which included providing over $6 million in aid to the music community. "I'm grateful," he says, "for the opportunity I've had to ensure we maximize the impact of every dollar distributed and react quickly and efficiently."

**If I wasn't working in the music business, I would be** "Helping others make better financial decisions or a stay-at-home dad spending as much time as possible with my 1-year-old daughter."

## Scout Easley

VP OF CREATIVE A&R

**SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING**

At what she calls "basically the best job in the world," Easley, 31, supports the creative visions of top songwriters including PinkPantheress, Remi Wolf, Dominic Fike, Addison Rae, d4vd, Jessie Murph and Jennie, "introducing them to new collaborators, pitching their songs, finding unique synch opportunities for their music and more." And with her superstar publishing client Chappell Roan leading the charge, Easley is enjoying "seeing artists go full out again" and flashing a "strong sense of identity. I'm so happy to see that people are pushing the boundaries and taking risks again because it's iconic behavior, and the world needs more icons."

**The best concert I've seen is** "Gwen Stefani's Harajuku Lovers Tour in 2005. That one really changed my life."

## Heather Vassar

**FOUNDER/CEO**

**CASUAL MEDIA PARTNERS**

**HEATHER VASSAR WAS IN DALLAS** working as an accountant, having given up her dreams of being a singer-songwriter, when she felt the pull to revisit Nashville and give music another shot — this time, from behind the scenes. "I just missed Nashville, being in a creative space," says the 38-year-old Texas native, who about a decade ago returned to Tennessee for graduate school at Belmont University and got a job in the digital marketing department at Universal Music Group Nashville. "That's where I found my footing: This is what I'm great at; this is what I can do. I'm still tied to music without having to be the one front and center onstage. It felt like the best of both worlds."

With experience from an artist's point of view and a penchant for numbers, Vassar went to work parsing the increasing volume of data flooding the label as the streaming era took hold — leading then-UMGN COO Mike Harris to create a new department for her, called strategy and research. "We were trying to be a bit more on the cutting edge than the rest of the labels in Nashville," she says.

Word about Vassar got around, and in 2019, when EMPIRE founder and CEO Ghazi started to put roots down for a Nashville division, he called her. EMPIRE's digital-first approach convinced Vassar "there was a path forward there," and she joined that December. But breaking into the sometimes insular, often traditional Nashville community was challenging, and she found that her biggest initial task was explaining to those around her that this Bay Area-based distribution company that specialized in hip-hop could bring a fresh, viable approach to Nashville's artists.

But with Vassar — who ultimately rose to senior vp of operations, Nashville, before her departure this May — in the fold, EMPIRE quickly made strides. In April 2021, Tenille Arts' "Somebody Like That" became the first top 10 Country Airplay hit written, produced and performed by all women, peaking at No. 3, and EMPIRE also released albums by Willie Jones and Waylon Payne.

Then Shaboozey, initially signed in 2020, bested them all. After releasing his 2022 album, *Cowboys Live Forever, Outlaws Never Die*, Vassar went to work helping him "bridge the gap of where he was and where he wanted to go" and develop the musical world in his mind. Boozey and his team had almost finished his next album when Vassar heard one last song — through a cellphone speaker — that he had just written that he wanted to include: "A Bar Song (Tipsy)." "As soon as you hear it, it's a hit record," she says. "It was like, 'Yeah, this should be the focus.' "

The track went on to tie the record for most weeks at No. 1 on the Hot 100, at 19, and made history by going top 10 on Country Airplay, Pop Airplay, Adult Pop Airplay and Rhythmic Airplay. The song's achievements eclipsed a year of highlights that included appearances on Beyoncé's *Cowboy Carter* album and five Grammy nominations, including best new artist, and required endless coordination by Vassar, EMPIRE and management. It's been validation for a career move that had many people initially telling Vassar to "call me when that fails."

"For the first couple of years, it felt like we were on the bottom," Vassar says. "So I'm trying to soak it in."

—DAN RYS

Shaboozey at KOKO in London in March.

DEPERSIA: COURTESY OF ALEX DEPERSIA. DONAHUE: AMANDA COLLINS/COURTESY OF MUSICARES. EASLEY: PAYTON NEWCOMER. VASSAR: MARC CORTES. SHABOOZEY: JOSEPH OKPAKO/WIREIMAGE.

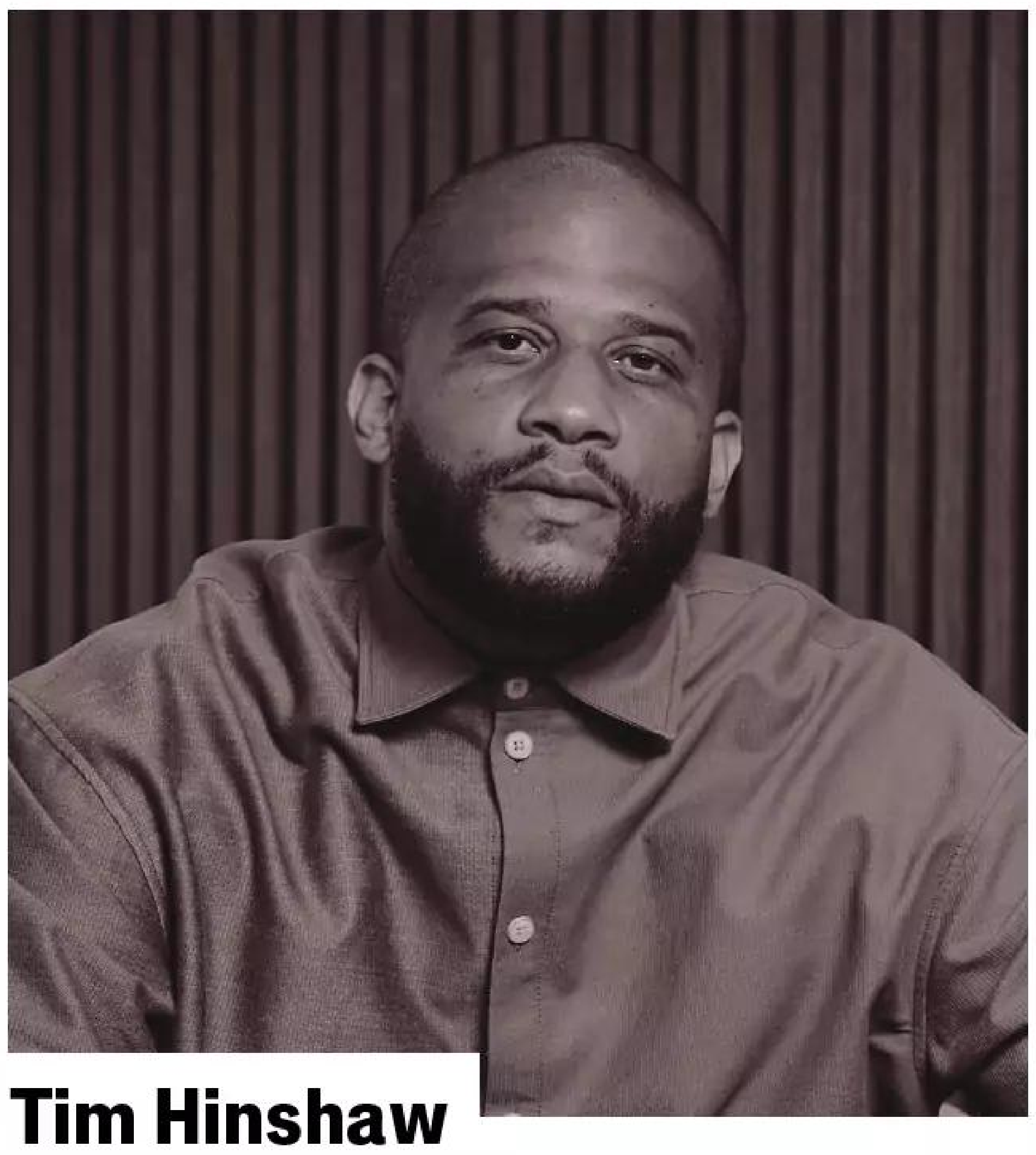
## Andrew Farwell

PRESIDENT

**OUTBACK PRESENTS**

During his 15-year run at Outback, the Nashville-based Farwell, 39, has helped the indie promoter grow from 13 employees into an 80-person operation that according to the company last year sold over 4.5 million tickets across 1,600 concerts in 280 cities. "I kind of do a little bit of everything, which is the best part of being an independent promoter," says Farwell, who helped launch the Nashville Comedy Festival and Chicago's 312 Comedy Festival and co-produced No Laughing Matter, a comedy benefit show at the Ryman Auditorium that raised over $120,000 for the victims of Hurricane Helene.

**The best advice I've received is** " 'Availability is the best ability,' from Outback founder and co-CEO Mike Smardak."



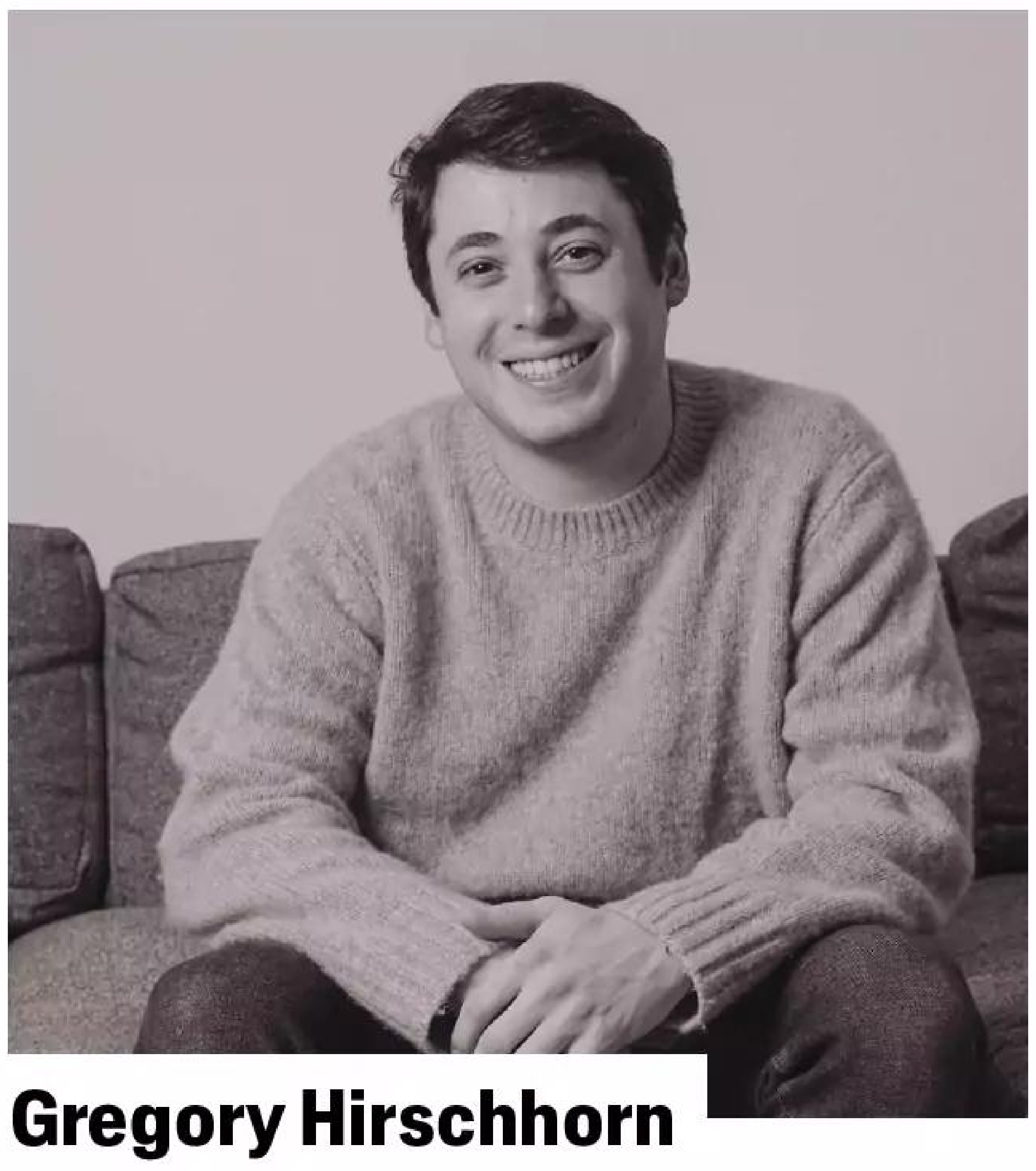
## Tim Hinshaw

FOUNDER/CEO

**FREE LUNCH**

After leaving Amazon Music, where he was head of hip-hop/R&B, in 2023, Hinshaw, 34, launched Free Lunch to "bridge the gap between corporate and culture in the most authentic way possible"; in its first year, his new venture worked with Kendrick Lamar (co-presenting his The Pop Out: Ken & Friends Juneteenth concert in 2024 with pgLang), Stevie Wonder, Amazon, Mitchell & Ness and Nike. In June 2024, Free Lunch announced a strategic partnership with AEG Presents, and earlier this year, it partnered with Warner to launch Free Lunch Records, with Grammy-nominated R&B stars Alex Isley and Syd its first signees.

**If I wasn't working in the music business, I would be** "[An owner of] a classic-car restoration shop."



## Gregory Hirschhorn

CO-FOUNDER/CEO

**TOO LOST**

Hirschhorn, 27, launched distribution company Too Lost at the end of 2020 to take advantage of a major shift in artists' attitudes: "There is a mass exodus from the traditional label deal and a growing interest in the independent distribution deal," he says. In addition to beaming music to streaming platforms around the world, Too Lost offers streaming analytics, funding for advances, publishing administration, reports on songs' usage on social media and more. Hirschhorn wears many hats, including leading product development — Too Lost just launched its mobile app — and negotiating both distribution deals with artists and partnerships with streaming services.

**Ten years ago, I was** "In my senior year of high school launching my first music venture."

## Gabz Landman

**SENIOR VP OF A&R**

**WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC**

SHE'S NOW ONE OF THE TOP A&R executives in the publishing business, but for a long time, Gabz Landman, senior vp of A&R at Warner Chappell Music, wasn't sure she wanted to be a publisher at all. "I had this incorrect perception that publishers work with songwriters but don't have a hands-on relationship with artist development," she says today. "That's not true in my experience at Warner Chappell."

Landman, 35, got her start as a *Billboard* intern while attending Syracuse University. From there, her music career took several different turns — and she figured out her strengths. First, she did management and A&R at TaP, where she helped develop a young pop artist named Dua Lipa. She then did A&R at both Artist Partner Group and Warner Records. "Every part of my career has wound up being so helpful to where I've landed," Landman says. "I think my eclectic background means I can jump in on anything a client needs ... I think I'm finally in the right place and in the right role. I'm so fulfilled and happy."

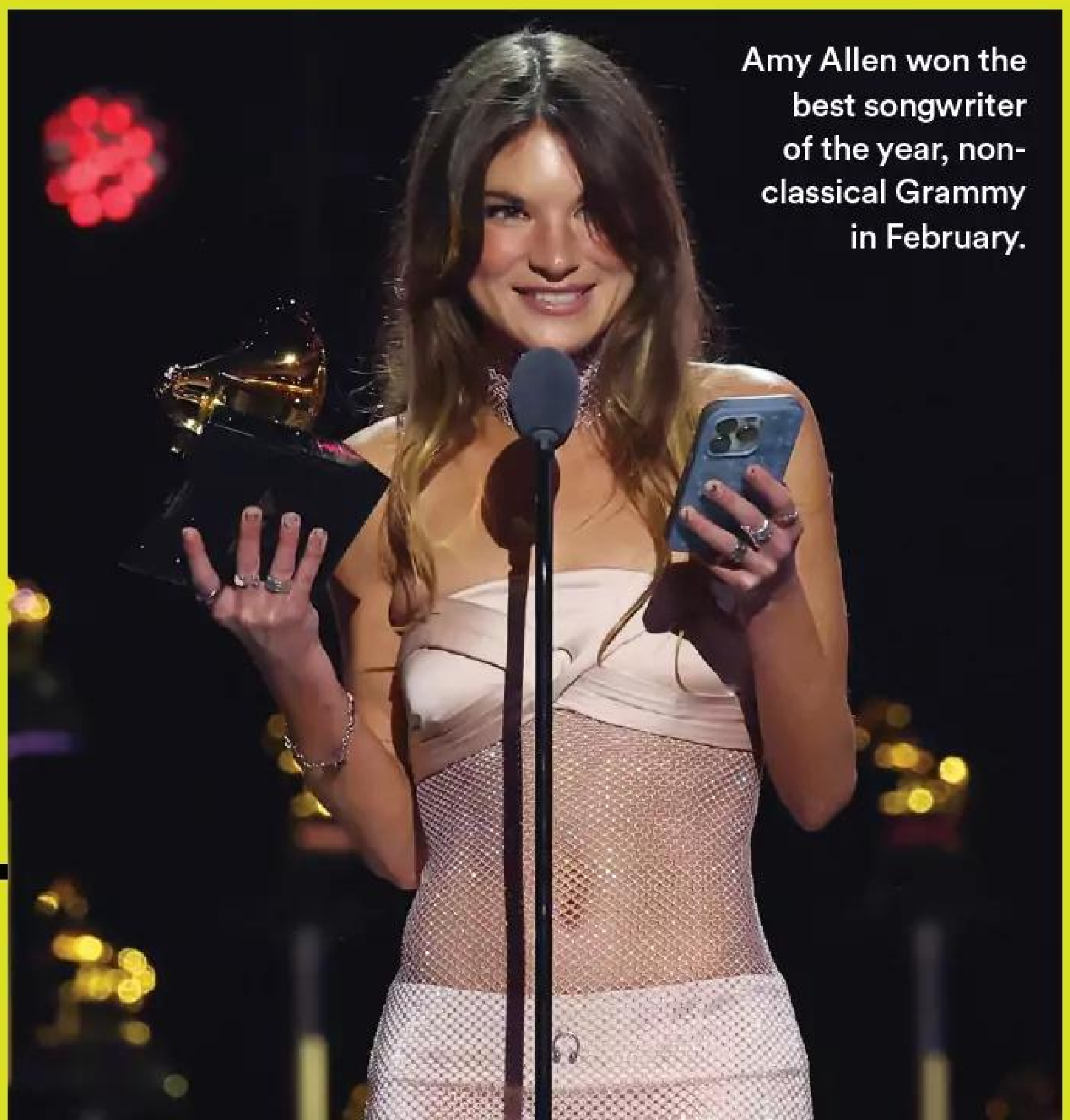
For Landman, there's a lot to be happy about these days. She manages and publishes songwriter-artist Amy Allen, who in February became the first woman to win the Grammy for songwriter of the year, non-classical — with Landman right by her side. "I convinced myself that it wasn't going to happen, and when they called her name, I was truly shaken to my core. I was so proud and happy for her," she says. "But honestly, the next day, Amy was back in the studio, working again at 11 a.m. We are kindred spirits in that way."

Over the years they've worked together, Allen has become perhaps the most sought-after pop writer today, contributing to hits by artists including Sabrina Carpenter (co-writing all of her *Short n' Sweet* album, including the Hot 100 top five songs "Espresso," "Please Please Please" and "Taste"), Tate McRae ("greedy"), Rosé and Bruno Mars ("APT.") and Halsey ("Without Me"). "Amy's proven herself as a force to be reckoned with — not just in pop but across multiple genres," Landman explains. "Whether it's Koe Wetzel or Sabrina Carpenter or *NSYNC, she can do anything."

Beyond Allen, Landman also publishes Laufey, Ian Kirkpatrick, Boy Matthews, Justin Tranter, John Ryan, Zeb and more. "It's incredible to get to sign such established talent and people that I've admired for so long, but I also love getting to play a role in people's first big cuts," she says, noting that her clients Cal Shapiro and Carrie K just scored their first No. 1s (K on Country Airplay for her work with Wetzel, Shapiro on Streaming Songs for his work with Alex Warren).

"Maybe this sounds cheesy, but getting to work with songwriters every day is literally my dream come true," she says. "When I moved to L.A. 10 years ago, I would leave work and hang out with songwriters — that was the community that embraced me and made me feel at home. The ability to kind of advocate and fight for them makes me so proud."

—KRISTIN ROBINSON



Amy Allen won the best songwriter of the year, non-classical Grammy in February.

FARWELL: COURTESY OF OUTBACK PRESENTS. HINSHAW: RASHIDA ZAGON. HIRSCHHORN: KEITH MORSE. LANDMAN: COURTESY OF WCM. ALLEN: LEON BENNETT/GETTY IMAGES.

## Sanchay "Dharmic" Jain

SENIOR VP/HEAD OF MARKETING

**ALAMO RECORDS**

Jain is hands-on with Alamo's all-star rap core of Rod Wave, Lil Durk and touted rookie BossMan Dlow: "I spend a lot of time on the road at shoots, on tour and during promo," the 33-year-old says. With Wave and Durk's latest releases cracking the Billboard 200's top five — and having just helped the former land his first Hollywood placement, for Ryan Coogler's blockbuster new film, *Sinners* — Jain has no plans to hit pause anytime soon.

**My favorite piece of merch I own is** "An Immortal Technique T-shirt. First piece of artist merch I bought and almost got me in trouble in high school."

## Merce Jessor

HEAD OF MARKETING

**VOLARA MANAGEMENT**

Jessor, who oversees marketing and strategy for Volara's clients, including superstar Sabrina Carpenter and pop multihyphenate MARINA, says his role requires focusing on "the bigger picture for each client: campaign goals, narratives and 12- to 24-month timelines." In the past year, the 30-year-old saw how much that method pays off: "[We set goals] with our team and for our clients in February of 2024 for the year and [watched] Sabrina and our team achieve and check off every single goal we wrote down — and then some."

**My favorite piece of merch I own is** "My Bad Bunny 'I Heart NY' tee — from his show at Yankee Stadium. Only real New Yorkers get it."

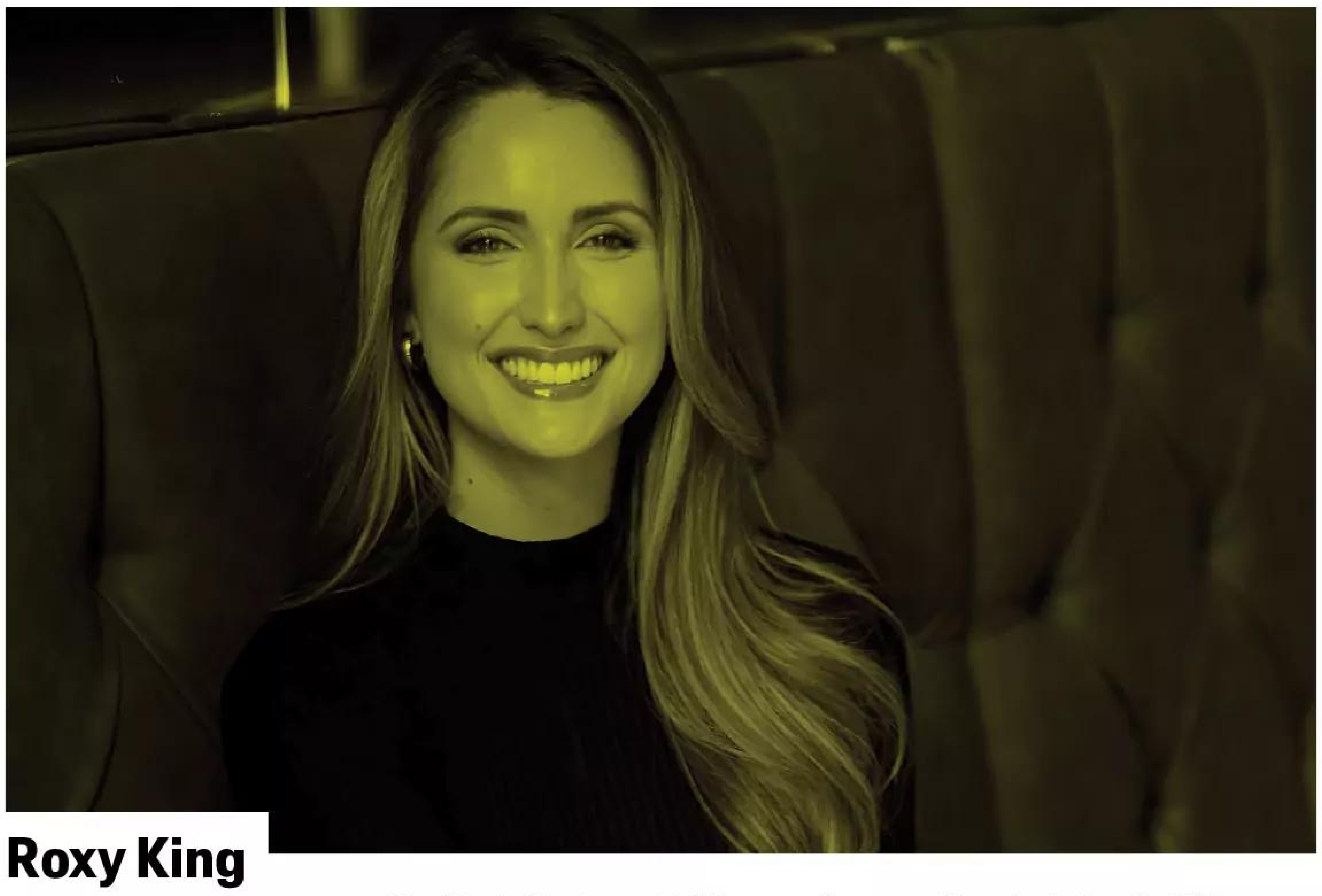
## Natasha Kilibarda

VP OF MARKETING AND CREATIVE STRATEGY

**ISLAND RECORDS**

Island Records dominated pop music in 2024 — and Kilibarda, 35, played a big part in its omnipresence. She helped the label run massively successful awards season campaigns for Sabrina Carpenter and Chappell Roan, and Island became the first label with two artists nominated in each of the Big Four categories at the Grammys. "Working these campaigns was the first time in my career when the 10-year-old little girl inside of me felt like she came out to play," she says.

**If I wasn't working in the music business, I would be** "Nurturing a flower farm of peonies so that once a year for six sweet weeks I could give people the same joy those flowers bring me every summer."



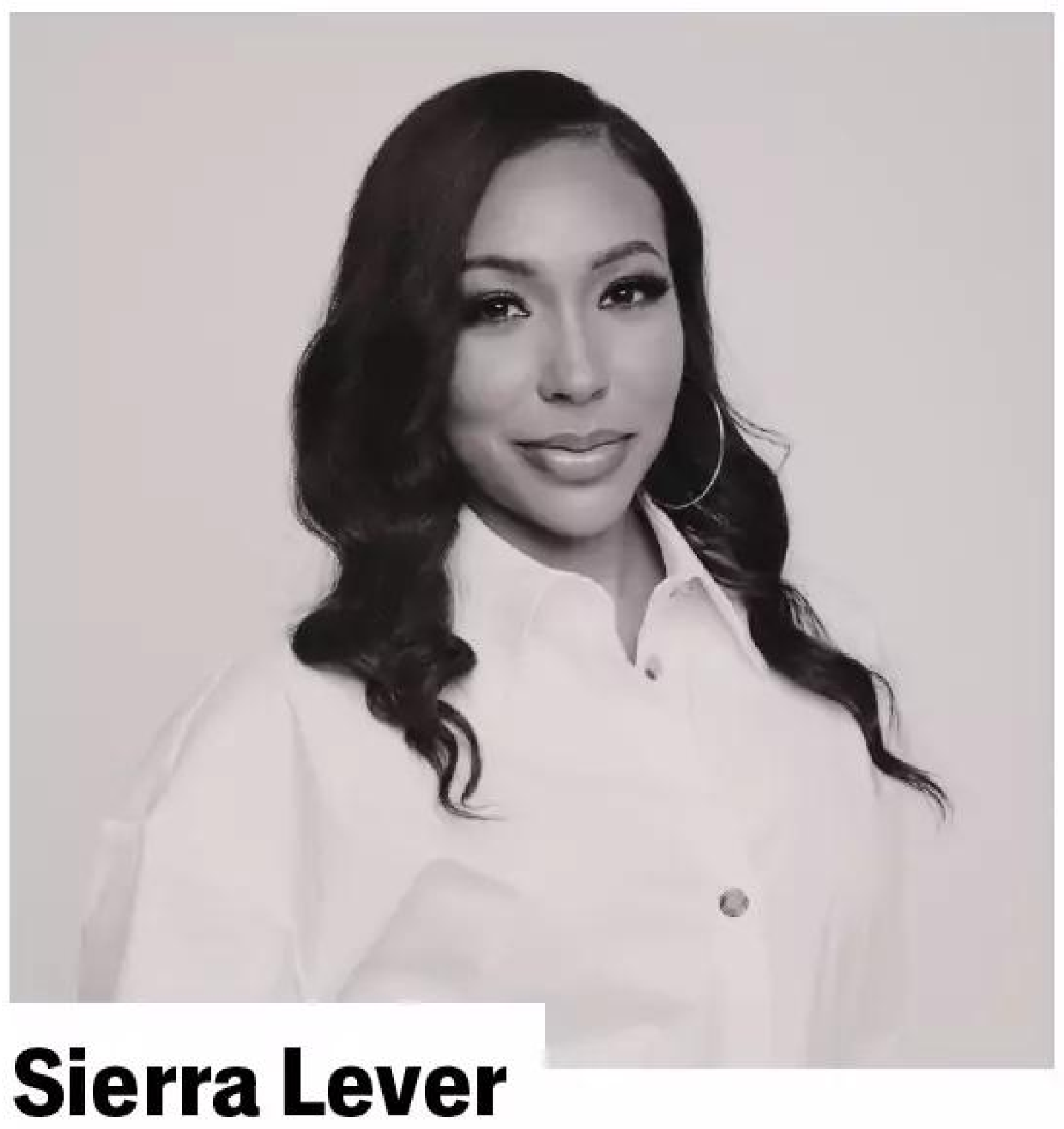
## Roxy King

SENIOR DIRECTOR OF A&R

**UNIVERSAL MUSIC PUBLISHING GROUP**

The Nashville-based A&R executive says "the sky is the limit" for day-to-day songwriters on Music Row. "What used to just be hit *country* songs are now just hit songs," explains King, 29, of guiding the careers of top local songwriters as Nashville has become a global destination for hits. Now she's pairing her songwriters with international stars, including a recent country-*música mexicana* collaboration between Cody Johnson and Carín León. "With such a high volume of songs being written," she says, "an A&R's challenge is to discern what is truly important to sign versus what happens to be available or attractive to sign."

**If I wasn't working in the music business, I would be** "A therapist. Although being in the music industry made it so I didn't have to choose between the two."



## Sierra Lever

HEAD OF HIP-HOP/R&B (ROTATION)

**AMAZON MUSIC**

At Amazon Music, Lever, 35, spearheads hip-hop and R&B artist partnerships, livestreaming, merchandising and exclusives. In 2024, that included leading the platform's record-breaking livestream of Kendrick Lamar's The Pop Out: Ken & Friends concert and helping to revitalize Rotation, its hip-hop and R&B hub. "While we champion emerging artists breaking new ground today, we must find ways to continue to support them throughout their careers alongside the pioneering legends who shaped our musical culture," says Lever, who also serves on the executive leadership council for the Black Music Action Coalition.

**The best concert I've seen is** "Kendrick Lamar's 2015 flatbed truck surprise concert promoting a Reebok running shoe drop. He tweeted the location and shut down Sunset Boulevard."

## Keith Levy

SENIOR VP

**WASSERMAN MUSIC**

For the Nashville-based Levy, 39, whose clients include Tyler Childers, Bobby Weir, Sierra Ferrell and The Milk Carton Kids, the professional and personal merged this year. When an uninsured client ended up in the emergency room between shows and was diagnosed with Stage 4 sarcoma in his lungs, "within 48 hours, my network and our network at Wasserman were able to get him referred, seen and ultimately treated at the [Ohio State University] sarcoma center in Columbus, Ohio," says Levy, calling the episode "more important than any show I've ever booked."

**My favorite piece of merch I own is** "A Clash T-shirt from their run on Broadway in the '80s that I stole from my dad's closet."

JAIN: NORA LEE. JESSOR: DANICA ROBINSON. KILIBARDA: NAGINA (NAE) LANE. KING: SYDNEY THOMAS. LEVER: LUCAS PASSMORE. LEVY: EMMA DELEVANTE.

## Sarah Montgomery

MANAGER
**FULL STOP MANAGEMENT**

At Full Stop, Montgomery helps veterans Bon Jovi and Tears for Fears maintain their legacies and reach new audiences through live performances, synch licensing, social media and more; that recently meant turning Bon Jovi's 40th anniversary into "a global event" and orchestrating Tears for Fears' sold-out Las Vegas residency and first live album and concert film. The 38-year-old, who also represents newer talent like Lizzo and JADE, says she's "proud to have led campaigns that fueled iconic, superstar and emerging artists to reach career-defining milestones."

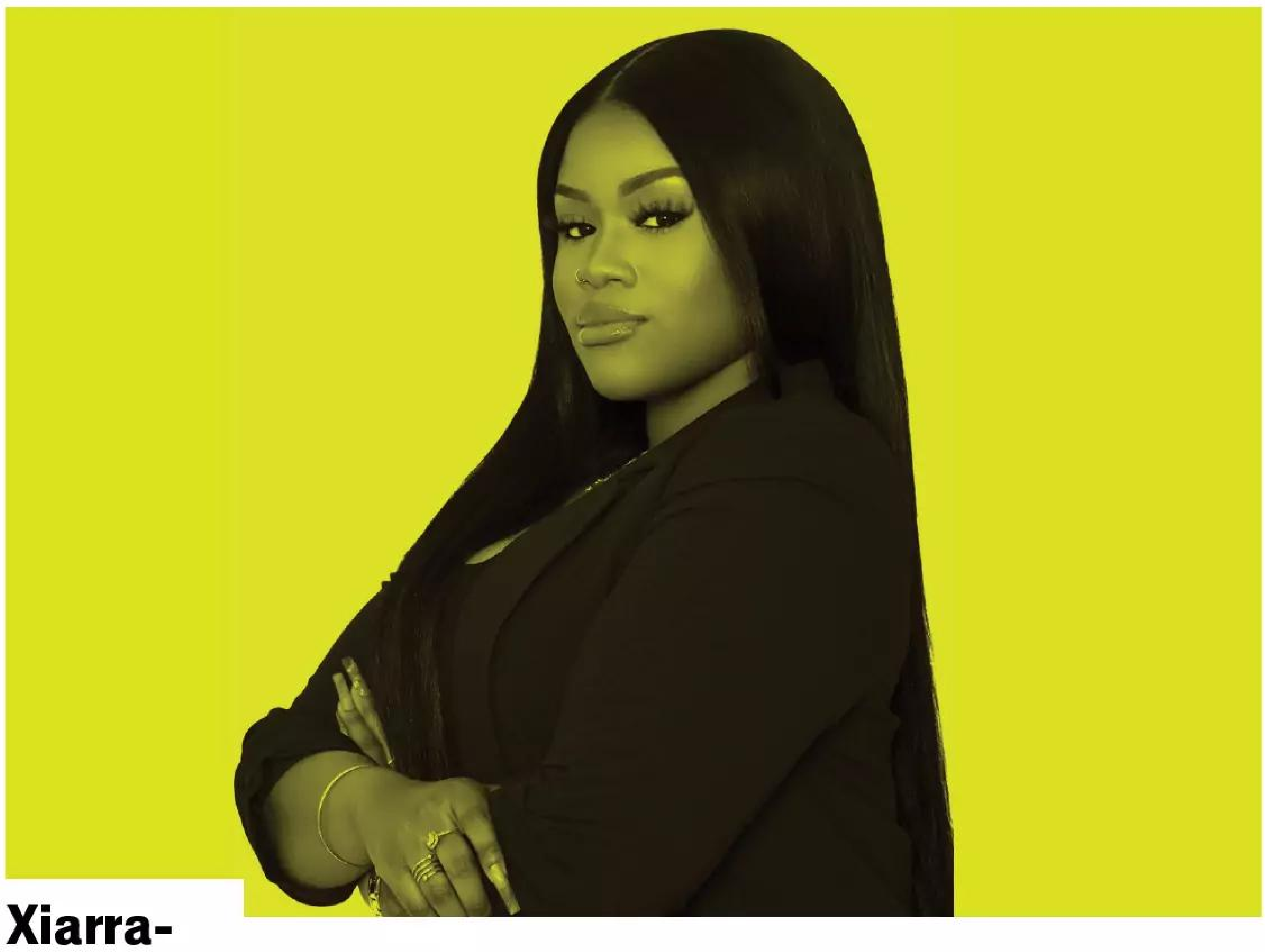
**The best advice I've received is** "Irving Azoff taught me the importance of always putting the artist first. That mindset has become my guiding principle in artist management."

## Matt Morris

EXECUTIVE VP OF A&R
**INTERSCOPE GEFFEN A&M**

During his tenure overseeing A&R at IGA, Morris, a one-time Interscope intern, has signed boygenius, Olivia Rodrigo, Kali Uchis, Amaarae, d4vd (alongside Darkroom Records) and Ivan Cornejo (alongside Interscope Capitol Miami) — an unusually genre-crossing assortment of stars and trailblazers. Beyond his ear for hot new talent, the 35-year-old is attuned to how Gen Z's shifting tastes are affecting established acts. "There are artists who released their most successful music 20-plus years ago but are bigger now than they were back then," he says.

**My favorite piece of merch I own is** "I have a few boxes of the Olivia Rodrigo x Sour Patch Kids laying around. That album campaign will always hold a special place in my heart."



## Xiarra-Diamond Nimrod

SENIOR VP/HEAD OF HIP-HOP/R&B MARKETING
**REPUBLIC RECORDS**

Nimrod, who interned at Universal Music Group a decade ago, now has a key marketing role at one of its most significant labels, where she has propelled artists including Metro Boomin, FLO, Ayra Starr and the Brooklyn rap group 41. "We're the glue of a project," the 30-year-old says of marketers. "It's our job to be the internal cheerleaders or internal managers, locking in release dates, shaping overall strategy and creating impactful moments throughout a campaign and even beyond it."

**Ten years ago, I was** "Doing a lot. I was going to every A$AP Mob concert I could, interning for their site and running A$AP Ferg fan pages."

## Alejandro Pabon

PARTNER
**MOVE CONCERTS**
HEAD OF OPERATIONS
**RIMAS NATION**

After releasing *DeBÍ TiRAR MáS FOToS* in January, Bad Bunny unveiled *No Me Quiero Ir de Aquí*, an unprecedented 30-show residency at the Coliseo de Puerto Rico in San Juan that sold out in just four hours and will draw an estimated 250,000 visitors to the island this summer. But Pabon, 38, and promoter Move Concerts helped to make the run's first nine shows exclusively for locals, by way of unique QR codes: "That was something that has never been done," he says, "and I take pride in how our team executed such a complex operation, selling over 100,000 tickets around the island."

**The best concert I've seen is** "Coldplay. Loved it!"

## Salomon Palacios

SENIOR VP OF MARKETING AND ARTIST STRATEGY
**UNIVERSAL MUSIC LATINO**

While Palacios describes himself as a record man through and through, he says, "Artist development from zero is my passion and forte"; his purview includes superstars like Juanes and Alejandro Fernández, but he highlights his work developing newcomers ROA and Latin Grammy best new artist Ela Taubert. A violist with a law degree and an MBA, Palacios, 35, started working at Universal Music Latino 10 years ago and views marketing as a "more multidisciplinary approach, which includes understanding and loving music, data and human behavior."

**If I wasn't working in the music business, I would be** "In tech."

## Ashley Pimenta

GM/HEAD OF MARKETING
**ELEMENT1 MUSIC**

"I take an artist's creative vision and their manager's big-picture goals and build a strategic and actionable plan," says Pimenta, 35, of her data-driven approach to identifying where superfans are and how they prefer to connect. She applied the strategy for Twenty One Pilots' 2024 album, *Clancy*, which hit No. 3 on the Billboard 200 and helped the band sell out arenas globally. "We really tapped into what makes their fan base so special," she says. "Watching how deeply they engaged, shared and showed up made the whole campaign feel like we were experiencing it with them."

**If I wasn't working in the music business, I would be** "Owning a cocktail bar with the perfect ambiance and a menu of unnecessarily extravagant concoctions."

MONTGOMERY: CHRISSY VARRATI. MORRIS: MIKAYLA LOBASSO. NIMROD: REPUBLIC RECORDS. PABON: MANUEL RIVERA. PALACIOS: @MATIGUIDO. PIMENTA: JOSIAH VAN DIEN.

# Sphere Of Influence

**ASSEMBLING A SHOW** for the technological mecca that is Las Vegas' Sphere is a head-spinning process for any artist and their team. But CAA agent Ferry Rais-Shaghaghi and Sphere Entertainment vp of live Erin Calhoun worked side by side to help create the buzzy, boundary-pushing run by melodic techno artist Anyma, who became the first electronic act to play the venue when he kicked off a residency there in late December that ran through early March.

Booking an electronic artist had been a priority, particularly given that the right artist would, Calhoun says, "be able to leverage all of Sphere's experiential technologies in a new, compelling way." Anyma (born Matteo Milleri) had been on the Sphere team's radar for years, and over time, it became clear that his international appeal, futuristic music and strong preexisting visual identity made the Italian American artist the perfect choice.

Rais-Shaghaghi says that for him and the rest of Anyma's team, Calhoun became "the point person for us to navigate everything." In the year or so it took to produce the show — titled *Afterlife Presents Anyma 'The End of Genesys'* — Calhoun and Rais-Shaghaghi formed, he says, "an incredible business relationship that became a friendship with someone we trusted and felt comfortable going to and having the difficult conversations we needed to have."

Through these conversations, the team created huge and viral moments, like the scene where a character falls through space, creating a wild, lightly dizzying effect for the audience. They also made a pair of cello-playing robots that helped bring Anyma's melodies to life. Calhoun says such elements "highlighted the way technology combines with artistry to make for an unforgettable experience." Milleri developed the visual feast of a show himself alongside Anyma's longtime visual creative director/lead computer graphics artist Alessio De Vecchi and head creative Alexander Wessely.

Rais-Shaghaghi and his team leveraged their network and hype around the residency to book support acts — "We looked at them more as guests," he says — for the run that included Peggy Gou, John Summit, Solomun, Amelie Lens, Charlotte de Witte and Tiësto, giving each night a mini-festival feel.

And when issues inevitably arose during production, Rais-Shaghaghi says Calhoun "would always help us in navigating it within her ecosystem and [figuring out] how we could get to the finish line. Erin is firm, but she knows how to get the results she needs without burning bridges. She's also really good at being a team player, understanding the artist's creative process and direction and being the voice between the artist and the owner of [Madison Square Garden] in finding that middle ground."

"We were completely aligned on the overall goal here: to blow everyone away with stunning visuals, next-level sound and an unparalleled live experience," Calhoun adds. "Every move we made was side by side, which is how we approach every artist playing our venue. The vision is led by the artist, and we do everything we can to make it happen. Ferry is so passionate and was hands-on throughout the entirety of the run."

This shared mission was ultimately a huge success, with the 12-night residency drawing more than 200,000 fans from around the world. The first eight dates alone sold 137,000 tickets and grossed $21 million, although Rais-Shaghaghi says money is ultimately beside the point.

"Obviously, as agents, we have to look at how we make our clients win financially," he says, "but more so, it's about how we can do things where the promoter wins, the fans win and the artists feel that they created an experience that a had high impact."

This show is clearly one such instance. "From the performers onstage to the fans in the crowd," Calhoun says, "everyone wanted more, more, more." —KATIE BAIN

The *Afterlife Presents Anyma 'The End of Genesys'* residency ran from December 2024 to March 2025 at Las Vegas' Sphere.

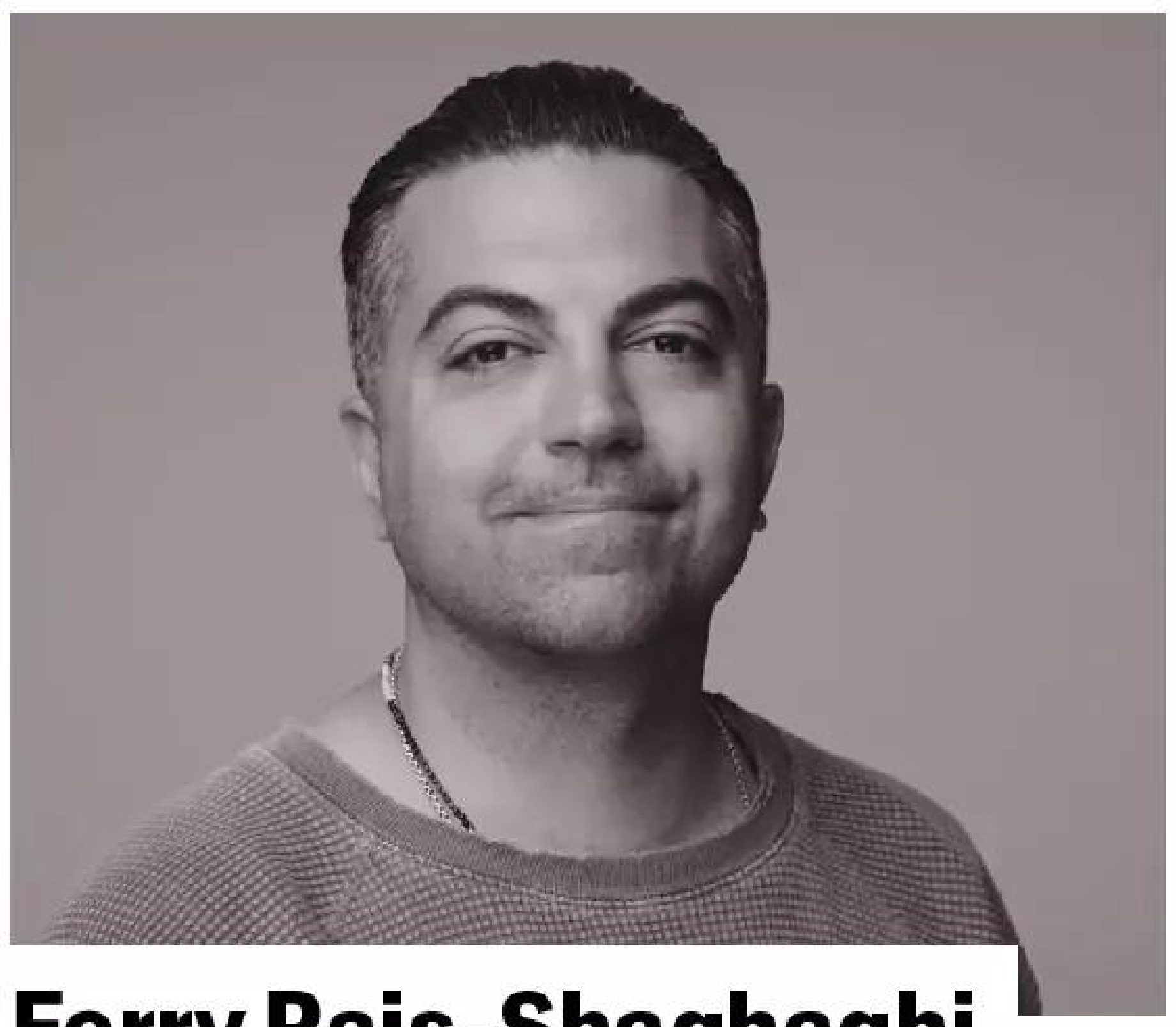
## Joe Puthenveetil

PARTNER

**RAINE GROUP**

Working across the media, entertainment and technology sectors for Raine, Puthenveetil, 39, has advised on the sales of catalog companies like Chord to Universal Music Group and Dundee Partners and Opus Music to Litmus and helped music entrepreneurs like Create Music's Jonathan Strauss and gamma.'s Larry Jackson raise growth capital. Raine also invests in companies like Firebird, which has launched numerous ventures and acquired companies across the management, recorded-music and publishing space in recent years. Says Puthenveetil: "There is more opportunity and growth than ever among independent labels, publishers and tech companies across the music landscape globally."

**The best concert I've seen is** "Amadou & Mariam at Webster Hall."



## Ferry Rais-Shaghaghi

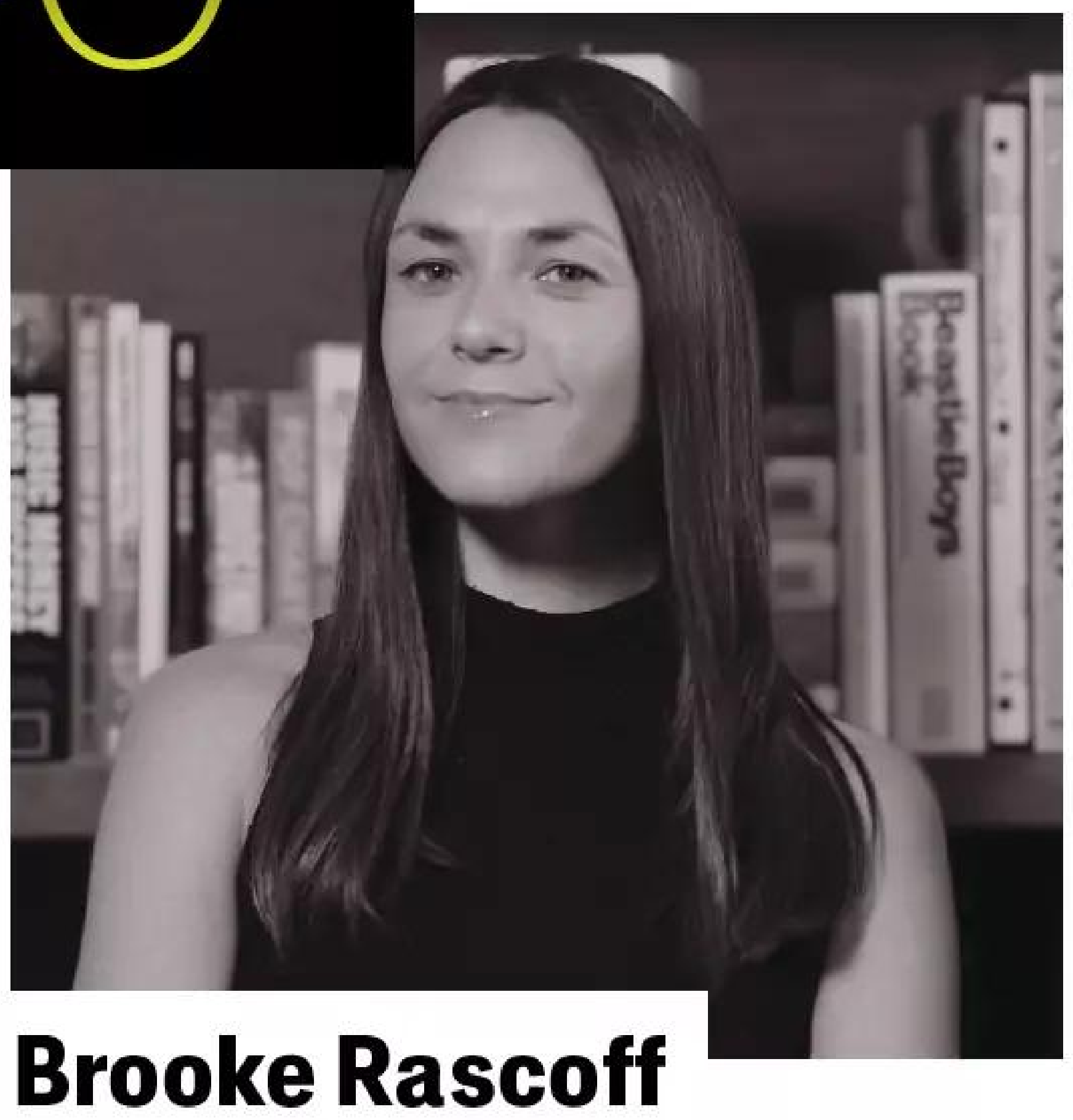
MUSIC AGENT

**CAA**

Rais-Shaghaghi calls Anyma's Sphere residency — the Las Vegas venue's first electronic booking — "a massive win" for CAA. The run reminded him that he has "never wanted to be an agent that just books the same traditional shows," thinking he has extended to other artists on his roster like Adriatique, Clonee and deadmau5, the lattermost of whom he signed in late 2024. "It's made me think in a more creative way for my other clients and be an architect not only when negotiating their deals but the strategy of how we grow their business year after year," says Rais-Shaghaghi, 39. "It's had a tremendous effect on my career."

**My favorite piece of merch I own is** "A signed Red Hot Chili Peppers guitar that sits on the wall of my home office."

ANYMA: COURTESY OF ANYMA. PUTHENVEETIL: COURTESY OF THE RAINE GROUP. RAIS-SHAGHAGHI: COURTESY OF CAA.



## Brooke Rascoff

GLOBAL HEAD OF MUSIC MARKETING

**RIOT GAMES**

The game developer behind *League of Legends* and more releases hundreds of songs annually related to its games and their extended ecosystems, and Rascoff, 32, leads the marketing strategy around them. This past year, she oversaw marketing for the season-two soundtrack of *Arcane*, the animated Netflix series based on *LoL* characters, which reached No. 24 on the Billboard 200, and the marketing strategy for Riot's partnership with Linkin Park for the 2024 *LoL* World Championship anthem — the biggest "Worlds anthem" debut in Riot history. The rapidly expanding overlap between gaming and music "provides a lot of innovative listening experiences for players" both in-game and beyond, Rascoff says, "and increased discovery for artists."

**The best concert I've seen is** "U2 at Slane Castle in Ireland, 2001."

## Bernarda Reyes Malavenda

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL MARKETING

**SONY MUSIC LATIN**

A Berklee College of Music-trained violinist, Reyes Malavenda digitally amplifies and promotes Sony Music Latin's top artists, including marketing merch and crafting exclusive partnerships. Recently, that has included superstar Rauw Alejandro's in-app TikTok campaign for his six-week Top Latin Albums No. 1, *Cosa Nuestra* — a first-of-its-kind initiative for a Latin artist — and Meta's partnership for Shakira's *Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran*, which Reyes Malavenda, 35, calls "a highlight of my career." In crafting new ways to connect with fans, she adds, "We're creating new experiences and products to better communicate."

**If I wasn't working in the music business, I would be** "[Taking] a stab at the fashion industry, either in luxury or something with my hands like sewing or embroidery."

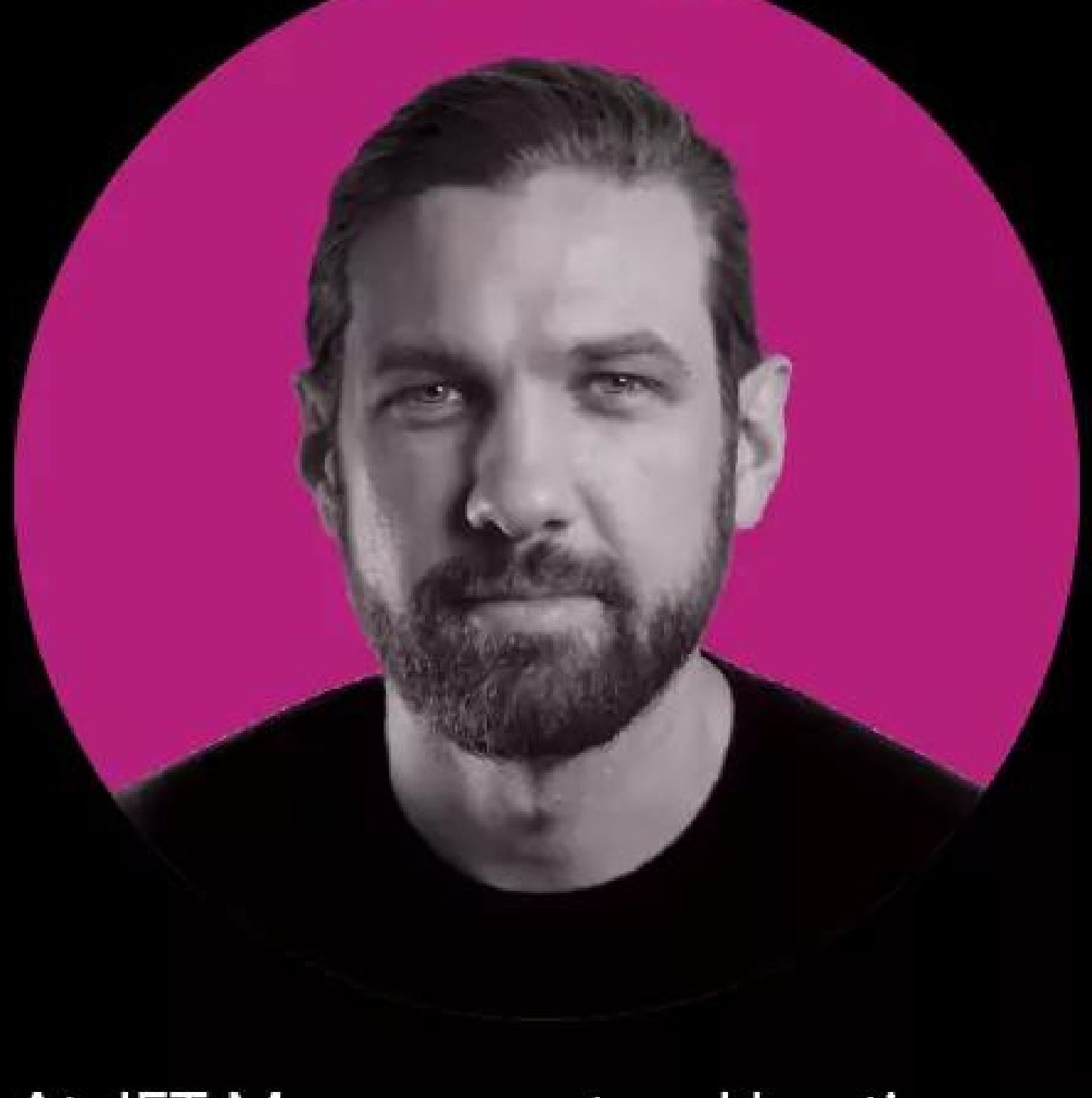
## Sabrina Sarmiento

DIRECTOR OF TALENT, GV FESTIVALS

**GOLDENVOICE**

For key Goldenvoice festivals including Coachella, Stagecoach and Morgan Wallen's new Sand in My Boots, Sarmiento's duties include "connecting the dots" between booking agencies and the promoter. Sarmiento, 35, also oversees operations for ancillary programs and the festival sites, "ensuring everything runs smoothly and aligns with the vision for each festival," she says. "It's a mix of big-picture planning and day-to-day coordination." Among the ancillary stages she has booked is Diplo's HonkyTonk at Stagecoach.

**The best concert I've seen is** "The Eras Tour. I've never seen a concert take over cities and gain new fans like Taylor [Swift] did during the Eras Tour. I saw it twice in one week."



## John Scholz

CEO/ARTIST MANAGER

**JET MANAGEMENT**

CO-FOUNDER/ CO-CEO

**MAISON ARTS**

At JET Management and boutique publisher Maison Arts, Scholz, 38, recruits and develops "not just world-class artists, songwriters and producers," he says, "but also the teams and resources we are building internally to support their missions." In 2024, JET achieved this mission with artists including French electronic duo Justice, whose album *Hyperdrama* generated the group's first No. 1 radio chart single (Grammy-winning Tame Impala collaboration "Neverender," on Alternative Airplay) and propelled its lauded tour.

**The best advice I've received is** "My first boss in the business, David Britz, once gave me a piece of advice that has stuck with me: 'If you're ever faced with a tough decision, always do what's best for the fan — you can't lose.' "

## Sam Sklover

VP OF BRAND PARTNERSHIPS

**PRIMARY WAVE MUSIC**

"I create big pop-culture moments between our roster of legendary artists and blue-chip brands/companies," says Sklover, 32. One such moment: The publisher's Bing Crosby catalog received a "huge boost of momentum" in 2024 when adidas partnered with clothier Malbon for an apparel line inspired by the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am golf tournament, once known as the "Crosby Clambake."

**My favorite piece of merch I own is** "My great-uncle, Norman Weiss, worked very closely with The Beatles — he booked them on that fateful *Ed Sullivan Show* performance. The four of them took a picture with Normy, signed it, and he gave it to my mother when she was a kid."

## John Stein

HEAD OF NORTH AMERICA EDITORIAL

**SPOTIFY**

In 2024, Spotify introduced editorial year-end content to its platform, including Stein and his team's best songs of the year list — "A big success for us," the 33-year-old says, that "showed the appetite for more qualitative recommendations on Spotify." The emphasis on editorial starkly contrasts with streaming's current embrace of artificial intelligence, but Stein, a 12-year Spotify veteran, envisions a balance: "While AI offers impressive scale and personalization, we're also seeing a growing appreciation for human recommendations that bring cultural insight, emotional depth and unique perspectives."

**Ten years ago, I was** "An editor at Spotify, so nothing has changed... Just kidding! The nature of the role has changed so dramatically over 10 years it's hard to even recognize what I was doing in 2015."

RASCOFF: COURTESY OF RIOT GAMES. REYES MALAVENDA: RUBEN MARTIN. SARMIENTO: COURTESY OF AEG PRESENTS. SCHOLZ: CHRISTINA CRAIG. SKLOVER: COURTESY OF PRIMARY WAVE. STEIN: COURTESY OF SPOTIFY.

### Sean Stevens

VP OF A&R
**WARNER RECORDS**

A decade ago, Stevens was working as a runner for Southern California tours and festivals ("I can parallel-park a 15-passenger van with my eyes closed"); roughly five years later, he signed an artist named Teddy Swims to Warner Records. As Teddy Swims' "Lose Control" became a smash and topped the year-end 2024 Hot 100 chart, Stevens, 32, has relished finally becoming a top-level artist advocate and facilitator. "Every day is a little different," he says, "but it's all in service of helping the artists I work with achieve their full potential."
**The best concert I've seen is** "The Rolling Stones at the 600-cap Belly Up in Solana Beach [Calif]. Or Paul McCartney's headline set at Coachella. I was 16 and cried like a baby."

### Tony Talamo

GM
**ATLANTIC MUSIC GROUP**

The revamped AMG has entrusted Talamo, 35, with its top-level marketing and newly formed central services departments — and his background, from joining 10K Projects in its startup phase to co-founding Homemade Projects, has informed his first year at the helm. "We've always been the entrepreneurial indie-label guys," Talamo says, "and for us to be able to implement our way of thinking, and shape the way a major label looks and feels in 2025 and beyond, has been quite the journey."
**The best advice I've received is** "AMG CEO Elliot Grainge often recites the story of the Chinese farmer — basically, what seems bad at first can lead to good and vice versa. It's taught me to embrace uncertainty and not jump to conclusions."

### Luis Villamizar

MANAGER
**FEID**

Villamizar began working with Feid in 2018 as his photographer, booking agent and administrative assistant before becoming his manager. Since then, he says he has been able to "support and execute" the Colombian star's exploding career "alongside a great team of young people who never stop dreaming" — and in 2024, Feid's massive *Ferxxocalipsis* tour of arenas and stadiums grossed more than $65 million across North and Latin America, according to Billboard Boxscore. Following its success, Villamizar, 35, says the Feid team is now "expanding into the European and Asian markets."
**The best advice I've received is** "My mom and dad once told me to be patient, remain calm and rational, have faith in yourself and everything will be OK."

STEVENS: WARNER RECORDS. TALAMO: RICH POLK. VILLAMIZAR: GUSTAVO CABALLERO FOR BILLBOARD. WEISE DONOVAN: NICK ANDERSON. ZINGLER: COURTESY OF ROLLING LOUD.

### Chloe Weise Donovan

SENIOR VP OF A&R
**RCA RECORDS**

"The last year has been the year of the female pop star," says Weise Donovan, who helped Tate McRae cross over to the A-list with her third album, *So Close to What*; launched Blackpink star Lisa's solo debut; and watched former Little Mix standout JADE win best pop act at the BRIT Awards. The 33-year-old says that this moment in pop is reminiscent of Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera's turn-of-the-millennium domination — and adds, "I am excited to see how the male pop stars come through next. Watch this space!"
**My favorite piece of merch I own is** "An old 'I Be That Pretty Motherfucker' A$AP Rocky T-shirt that gives you that extra confidence boost when you put it on!"

### Matt Zingler

CO-FOUNDER/CO-CEO
**ROLLING LOUD**
FOUNDER
**MOTION MUSIC**

Since co-founding Rolling Loud with Tariq Cherif in 2015, Zingler, 36, has worked to make it a place for "bringing people together, bridging communities and creating opportunities for people to meet, work together and hopefully amplify or slingshot their careers to the next level." That drive has helped it become the dominant hip-hop player in the festival market — the day after Playboi Carti released his Billboard 200-topping album *MUSIC*, he headlined Rolling Loud Los Angeles, where The Weeknd and streaming personality Kai Cenat joined him onstage — and has fueled its international expansion and booming merchandising and brand partnerships operations.
**If I wasn't working in the music business, I would be** "A terrible tattoo artist, and I would love every tattoo I did."

## Contributors

*Katie Bain, Dave Brooks, Eric Renner Brown, Leila Cobo, Hannah Dailey, Stephen Daw, Kyle Denis, Griselda Flores, Lyndsey Havens, Steve Knopper, Carl Lamarre, Elias Leight, Jason Lipshutz, Joe Lynch, Heran Mamo, Elizabeth Dilts Marshall, Rebecca Milzoff, Taylor Mims, Melinda Newman, Kristin Robinson, Jessica Roiz, Dan Rys, Andrew Unterberger*

## Methodology

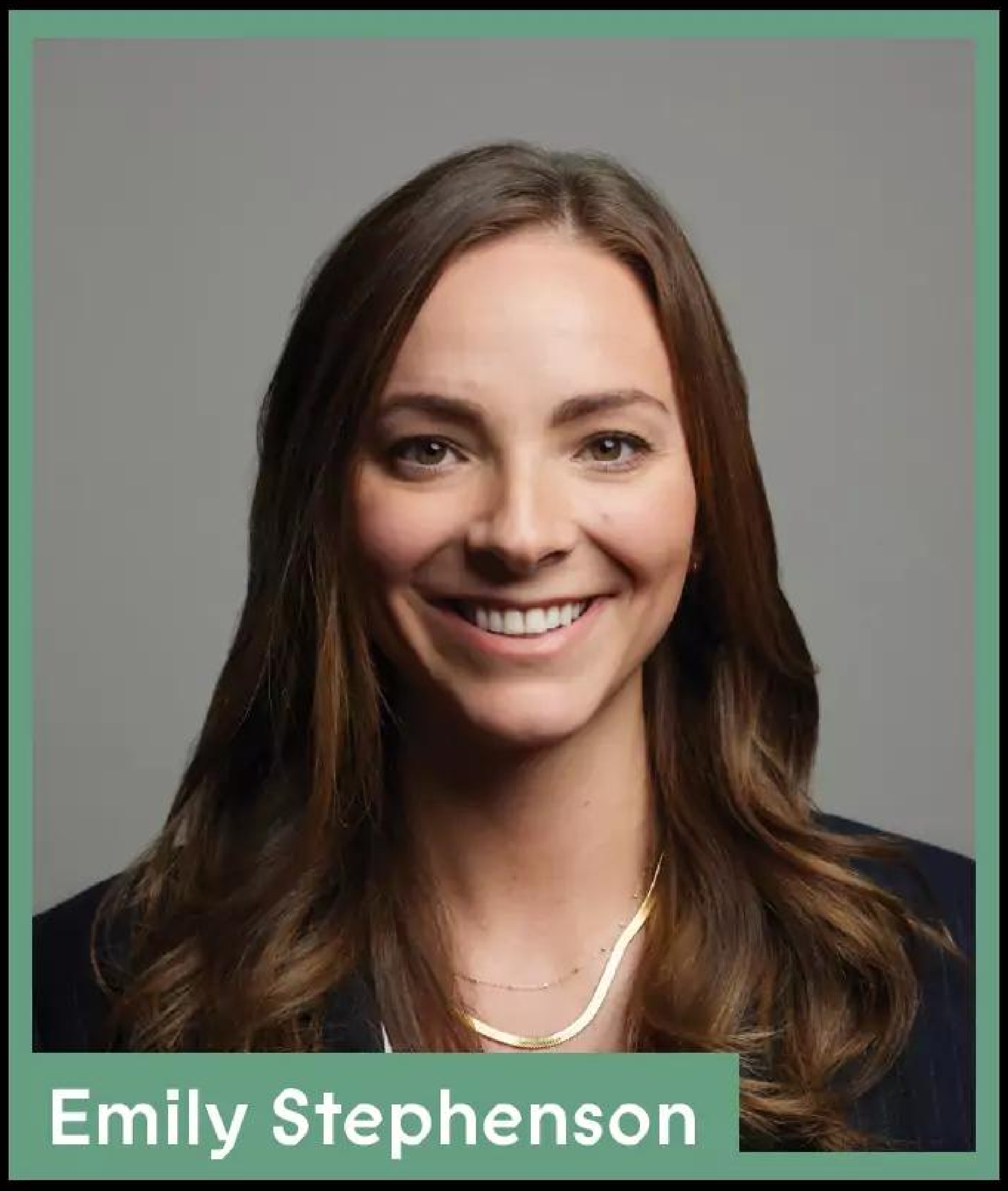
Nominations for *Billboard*'s executive lists open no less than 150 days in advance of publication, and a link is sent to press representatives by request before the nomination period. (Email thom.duffy@billboard.com for inclusion on the email list for nomination links and to obtain an editorial calendar.) *Billboard*'s 40 Under 40 list was chosen by editors from selected industry sectors, based on factors including, but not limited to, nominations by peers, colleagues and superiors. In addition to information requested with nominations, editors consider industry impact as measured by metrics including, but not limited to, chart, sales and streaming performance as measured by Luminate and social media impressions using data available as of March 18.

Congratulations to our

# Global Power Players

**Pieter Van Rijn**

Chief Executive Officer,
Downtown Music



**Emily Stephenson**

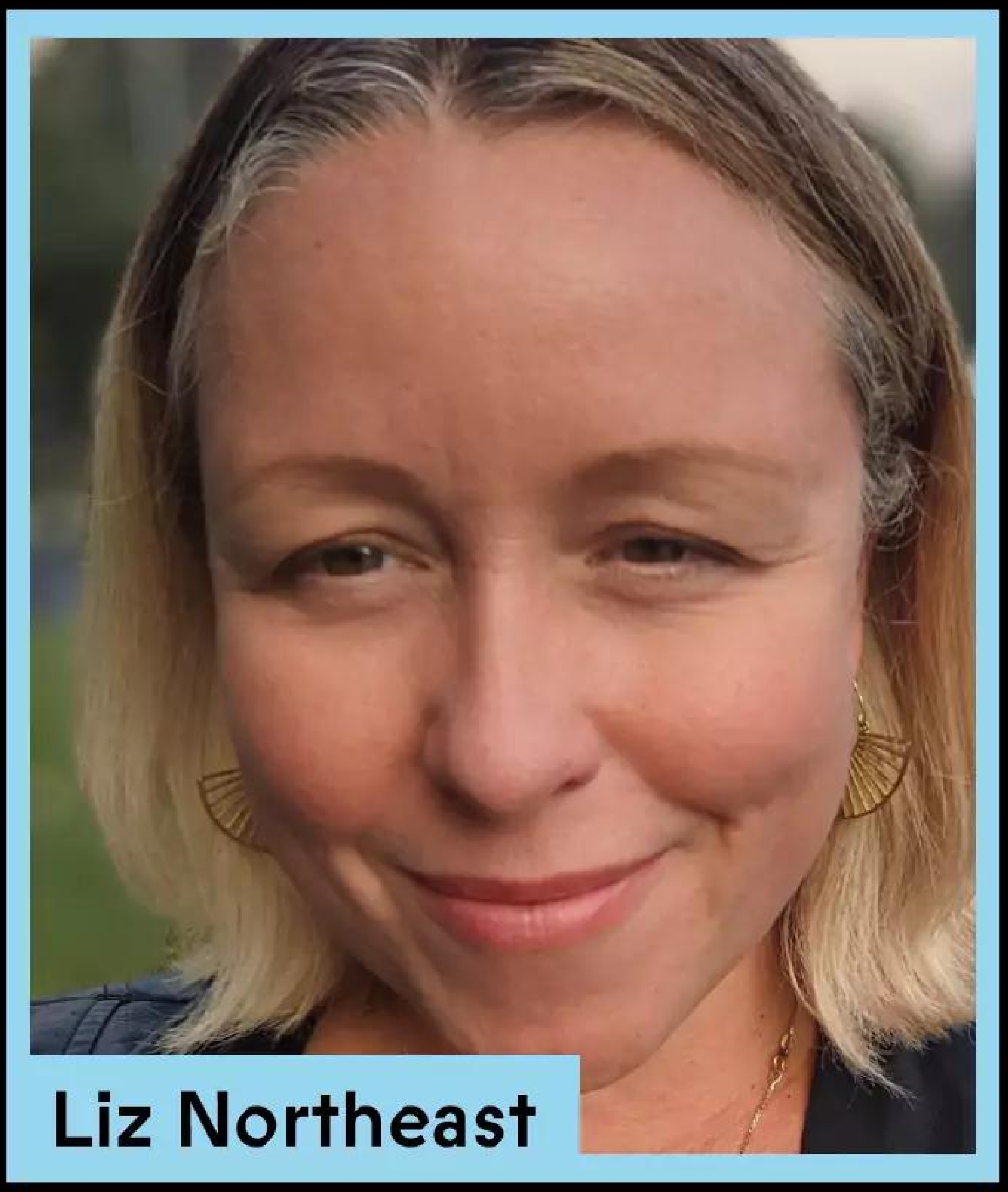
President,
Downtown Music Publishing

**Ray Tapia**

Vice President of A&R, Latin,
Downtown Artist & Label Services

**Thando Makhunga**

Managing Director,
Sheer Publishing Africa



**Liz Northeast**

Senior Vice President, EMEA,
FUGA

**Renato Vanzella**

General Manager,
LATAM, FUGA

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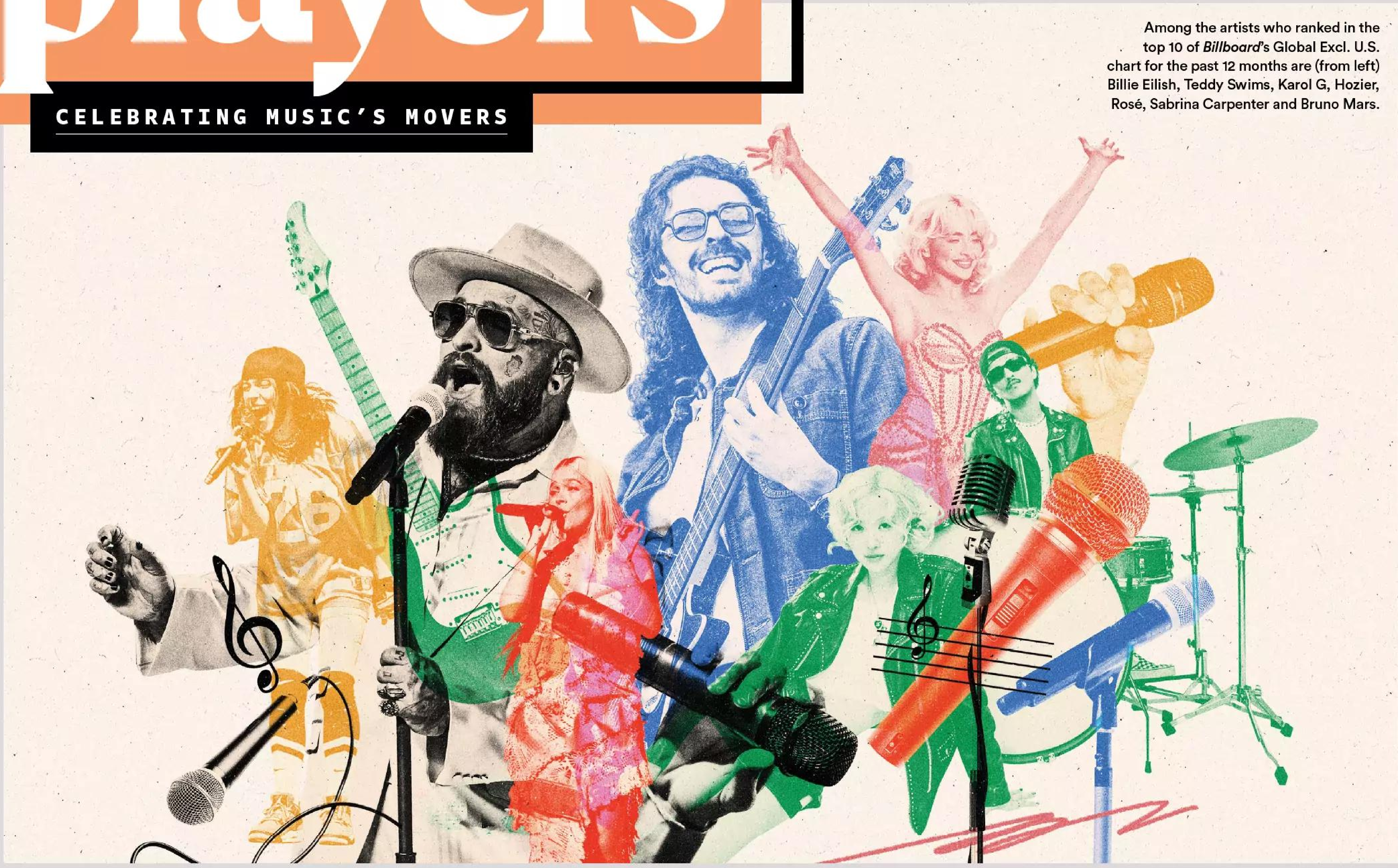
# players

CELEBRATING MUSIC'S MOVERS



Among the artists who ranked in the top 10 of *Billboard*'s Global Excl. U.S. chart for the past 12 months are (from left) Billie Eilish, Teddy Swims, Karol G, Hozier, Rosé, Sabrina Carpenter and Bruno Mars.

# 2025 GLOBAL POWER PLAYERS

As the recorded-music business worldwide grew for the 10th consecutive year, amid the uncertainty posed by generative AI, these are the executives driving success for artists outside the United States

BY THOM DUFFY

**RECORDED MUSIC IS A** small but mighty sector" of the world's business, IFPI CEO Victoria Oakley said as she introduced the association's annual report in March. "It's a part of the global economy that really matters. Above all, it's a powerful example of human artistry and connectivity."

Oakley quantified the impact of that artistry with a report full of good news — mostly. The recorded-music business worldwide grew for the 10th consecutive year, despite concerns raised by generative artificial intelligence (AI) using copyright-protected music to train its systems.

Total recorded-music revenue climbed to $29.6 billion in 2024, a rise of 4.8% on the previous year, with streaming revenue surpassing $20 billion for the first time, representing just under 70% of global recorded-music sales, according to IFPI's Global Music Report 2025. Similarly, CISAC in October reported that global royalty collections for song rights holders grew 7.6% in the previous year. In the concert industry, Live Nation's adjusted operating income rose 14% in 2024.

"Today, we celebrate not just these results and these phenomenal artists, but also the amazing hard work that goes into making it happen behind the scenes," Oakley said.

Those working behind the scenes are celebrated here, on *Billboard*'s Global Power Players list.

Nominated by their firms and peers and chosen by our editors from selected industry sectors, these executives have primary responsibility for markets outside the United States, which account for some 60% of the world's recorded-music revenue.

They work where the action is — or at least, the greatest growth. While the United States held its place as the No. 1 recorded-music market in the world, its revenue increased only 2.2% in 2024, compared with 7.2% in 2023.

Japan, still the world's second-largest recorded-music market, was flat in 2024. But among the world's remaining top 10 markets, IFPI reports rates of growth in the United Kingdom (up 4.9%), Germany (up 4.1%), China (up 9.6%), France (up 7.5%), Canada (up 1.5%), Brazil (up 21.7%) and Mexico, the top 10 market where its revenue increased 15.6%. (South Korea was down 5.7%.)

In other regions, recorded-music growth has been even more dramatic. Latin America experienced growth of 22.5%. The Middle East and North Africa, which are almost entirely dominated by streaming, had music sales grow 22.8%, and sub-Saharan Africa recorded a 22.6% rise in revenue to surpass $100 million for the first time, albeit from a modest baseline. Just as the rise of file-sharing dramatically cut the fortunes of the music industry at the turn of the 21st century, today, executives nervously watch the rise of another technology — generative AI — due to its potential and its threat to copyright. Many of the executives profiled in this list cite AI as the biggest issue facing the industry.

IFPI's presentation in London took place against the backdrop of a campaign in the United Kingdom to oppose proposed changes by the government to copyright law that, if implemented, could let AI developers freely use creators' content to train their algorithms, unless rights holders "opt out."

"We are asking policymakers to protect music and artistry," Oakley said in a statement accompanying the Global Music Report. "We must harness the potential of AI to support and amplify human creativity, not to replace it."

EILISH: KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES. SWIMS, CARPENTER: CHRISTOPHER POLK. KAROL G: AMY SUSSMAN/GETTY IMAGES. HOZIER: ERIKA GOLDRING/GETTY IMAGES. ROSÉ, MARS: JOHN V. ESPARZA.

ILLUSTRATION BY KLAWE RZECZY

# Music Groups: Global

### Fred Gillham
MANAGING DIRECTOR, U.K. AND EUROPE, CONCORD LABEL GROUP

### Rebecca Berman
SENIOR VP OF INTERNATIONAL, CONCORD LABEL GROUP

**CONCORD**

It's hard to top the success of breakout star Tommy Richman's "Million Dollar Baby." Concord's Berman says the Billboard Global 200 chart-topping smash that also was a massive hit on TikTok and global radio "was a huge achievement for both Richman and Concord," after its initial U.S. release through ISO Supremacy and Pulse Music Group. In addition, she says that the continued expansion of Concord's global marketing network has contributed to the label group's growing prowess around the world. "We have expertise in every major market in the world," she says, "dedicated to executing globally minded campaigns to reach fans everywhere and find new audiences."

**Biggest issue now** "The changing nature of how audiences consume and how difficult it can be to find your engaged audience. These changes are emphasized further with the globalized nature of the music industry, where platforms, DSPs [digital service providers], etc., may be different from country to country or region to region," Berman says. "Blanket approaches to international marketing are ineffective."

### Adam Granite
CEO, AFRICA, THE MIDDLE EAST AND ASIA

### Michelle Teh
SENIOR VP OF GLOBAL CLASSICS AND JAZZ

**UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP**

Granite sees "our growth across Greater China, India, the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Africa through organic A&R success" as being among the highlights of the past year for UMG. He also cites "the expansion of our distributed label business in partnership with Virgin and our continued merger and acquisition focus." However, he adds that finding "the appropriate monetization for real engagement" could challenge growth going forward. Granite also spent valuable time over the past year community-building, including visiting Dharavi Dream Project's After School of Hip-Hop in Mumbai, India, a partnership involving UMG that provides youth outlets for artistic expression utilizing hip-hop culture.

**The music business today in a word** "Exciting," Granite says.

### Celine Joshua
EXECUTIVE VP OF GLOBAL MARKETING

### Johannes von Schwarzkopf
CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER

**BMG**

BMG reported in March that it generated 963 million euros ($1 billion) in revenue in 2024, marking a 6.4% increase over the previous year, with major wins coming from artists like country superstar Jelly Roll and rap hit-maker Mustard. Von Schwarzkopf considers the successful execution of the company's BMG Next strategy to be a big factor in its recent success: "In the last 12 months, we've built global teams in recorded catalog, sales and marketing to better support our artists and songwriters worldwide, while also strengthening our local artist career teams where proximity to the market matters," he says. "By working collaboratively across borders, our teams are strengthening our international business relationships, improving our service to artists and songwriters and positioning BMG for sustainable growth."

**The music business today in a word** "Opportunity," von Schwarzkopf says.

### Melissa Thomas
EXECUTIVE VP OF INTERNATIONAL MARKETING FOR U.S. REPERTOIRE

### Wouter Jansen
SENIOR VP OF INTERNATIONAL MARKETING,
DIGITAL AND COMMERCIAL STRATEGY

### Naoise Ryan
VP OF INTERNATIONAL MARKETING, COLUMBIA RECORDS

**SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT**

Sony's international team recently worked on campaigns for Beyoncé's *Cowboy Carter*; Tyler, The Creator's *Chromakopia*; and both Future's collaborative albums with Metro Boomin, *We Don't Trust You* and *We Still Don't Trust You*, and solo release *Mixtape Pluto*. They also marketed multiple singles from SZA's *SOS Deluxe: LANA* ahead of her headlining slots at Glastonbury and London's BST Hyde Park festivals in the United Kingdom. The Sony team also worked on campaigns for Travis Scott, Tyla, PartyNextDoor and Addison Rae, as well as Blackpink stars Lisa and Jennie. Sony Music's key to success, Thomas says, is that "all of our campaign highlights from the past 12 to 18 months have had one through line: fan strategy."

**The music business today in a word** "Competitive — in the best way possible," Thomas says.

### Eric Wong
PRESIDENT OF EASTWEST RECORDS/HEAD OF GLOBAL A&R

### Jessica Keeley-Carter
CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER

### Tony Corey
SENIOR VP OF GLOBAL MARKETING

### Zac Froud
VP OF GLOBAL MARKETING

**WARNER MUSIC GROUP**

WMG's global teams have "collaborated to secure standout results across key markets" for its rising stars, according to Keeley-Carter. Blackpink's Rosé charted in the top 10 in more than 10 countries and has spent 19 weeks at No. 1 on *Billboard*'s Global Excl. U.S. chart with "APT." with Bruno Mars. Teddy Swims' recent album, *I've Tried Everything but Therapy (Part 2)*, hit No. 1 on the Australian Recording Industry Association chart; Benson Boone's single "Sorry I'm Here for Someone Else" reached Spotify charts in 30 different markets; and Alex Warren's "Ordinary" hit No. 1 on the Official Singles Chart in the United Kingdom.

**The music business today in a word** "Noisy," Keeley-Carter says. "We're here to help our artists rise above it and make their mark."

# Music Groups: Canada

### Julie Adam
PRESIDENT/CEO

**UNIVERSAL MUSIC CANADA**

According to Universal Music Canada, it released the top seven of the 10 best-performing albums of 2024 thanks to Post Malone, Billie Eilish, Sabrina Carpenter, The Weeknd, Morgan Wallen, Noah Kahan and Taylor Swift. "We anchored and supported each project with Canada-specific campaigns, content and fan events," Adam says. "Our domestically signed acts continue to impact international markets. Rising pop star Sofia Camara is exploding in the U.K., country breakout Josh Ross continues to climb the charts in the U.S. and beyond, comedian turned singer-songwriter Mae Martin released their debut album, Owen Riegling is breaking out with national brand partnerships, and Punjabi super-producer thiarajxtt is driving artist discovery with fans from South Asia to Canada."

**The music business today in a word** "Artists. All that we do is for, about and in support of artists."

### Kirsten Burke
PRESIDENT

**WARNER MUSIC CANADA**

"One of Warner Music Canada's biggest success stories this past year was the extension of our partnership with Karan Aujla," Burke says, noting the extended joint venture between Warner Music Canada and Warner Music India. "As the most streamed Punjabi artist on Spotify worldwide in 2024, Karan's influence is undeniable," says Burke, who adds that the Indian rapper is known for constantly evolving and pushing the boundaries of both Punjabi and global music. "We kicked off the year with the release of 'Tell Me,' a dynamic Punjabi-English collaboration with OneRepublic. The song quickly charted in Canada, [the United Arab Emirates], Australia, New Zealand, the U.K., Pakistan and India, further underscoring his global appeal."

**Biggest issue now** "The impact of AI on creativity, rights management and artist compensation."

Blackpink's **ROSÉ** has spent 19 weeks atop the Global Excl. U.S. chart with "APT." with Bruno Mars.

TODD OWYOUNG/NBC/GETTY IMAGES

### Shane Carter

PRESIDENT

SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT CANADA

"I am honored to be part of the team who brought Céline Dion's deeply personal, moving story to the world in the documentary *I Am: Céline Dion*," says Carter, who worked as an executive producer alongside teams at Sony Music Canada, Sony Vision and several global partners to bring the film to life. "Everyone involved in this project was so talented and 100% committed to the collaboration required to tell Céline's story with sensitivity and authenticity. It was a highlight of the year — and also my career." The journey culminated in Dion's powerful return to the stage at the opening ceremonies for the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris.

**Biggest issue now** "We work alongside artists to build their audience authentically over time. This requires deeper collaboration across teams and innovative, strategic campaigns that truly connect. It's a challenge — but also an exciting opportunity to match artists' creativity with bold new ways to share their music with the world."

## Music Groups: Europe, Middle East & Africa

### Frank Briegmann

CHAIRMAN/CEO

UNIVERSAL MUSIC CENTRAL EUROPE AND DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON

### Olivier Nusse

CEO

UNIVERSAL MUSIC FRANCE AND UNIVERSAL MUSIC AFRICA (FRENCH-SPEAKING)

### Patrick Boulos

CEO

UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

### Franck Kacou

MANAGING DIRECTOR

UNIVERSAL MUSIC AFRICA

It was a banner year for UMG throughout Africa and Europe, particularly in Germany, where half of the top 10 albums on the year-end 2024 charts belonged to UMG, and the company held six places among the top 10 most streamed music artists. "We are also very proud that we have been able to break six domestic artists," Briegmann says. Deutsche Grammophon artists were No. 1 on the German classical chart in 10 out of 12 months in the last year. In Italy, UMG landed six of the top 10 albums on the year-end 2024 chart, while UMG albums were No. 1 in the Netherlands for 33 out of 52 weeks. For Nusse, Stromae & Pomme's "Ma Meilleure Ennemie," which was featured in the *Arcane* TV series, became a global success with nearly 470 million streams, "85% of which came from international markets," he says.

**The music business today in a word** "Artist-centric," Nusse says.

### Tony Harlow

CEO

WARNER MUSIC U.K.

From his post leading Warner Music in London, Harlow has supported Warner Music Group developments, including the overall reorganization of the company and the restructuring of its leadership in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Both changes "have opened new doors for us," he says. "The return of Warner Records U.S. and Atlantic Records U.S. as a repertoire powerhouse has hugely helped us," Harlow says, giving a shoutout to the executives guiding those companies who have helped drive the global success of U.K. artists including Charli xcx and Coldplay.

**Biggest issue now** "Pessimism. If you talk yourself down, guess where you will end up?"

### Jason Iley

CHAIRMAN/CEO, SONY MUSIC U.K. AND IRELAND

SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT U.K.

Iley and his Sony team are celebrating the success that Myles Smith and Central Cee are having "at a global level," he says. Cee's debut album, *Can't Rush Greatness*, hit No. 9 on the Billboard 200. Meanwhile, Smith, who signed to RCA on Christmas Eve in 2023, won the BRIT Awards' Rising Star honor in March, and his track "Stargazing" topped the Alternative Airplay chart. "Beyond chart success," Iley says, "I'm really pleased to see results from the holistic work we've put into strengthening our business," with a focus on employee wellness and an award-winning childcare policy. Such initiatives, he adds, "demonstrate the importance of listening — listening to what our artists and people need from us in order to succeed."

**Biggest issue now** "AI is a global issue and one that we are at the forefront of in the U.K. We have been working to help the government understand the implications of their proposed copyright reforms [that would] present a serious threat to our artists and their work."

### Daniel Lieberberg

PRESIDENT OF CONTINENTAL EUROPE AND AFRICA

SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

### Christoph Behm

CEO

SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT GERMANY, SWITZERLAND AND AUSTRIA

### Marie-Anne Robert

MANAGING DIRECTOR

SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT FRANCE

### Sean Watson

MANAGING DIRECTOR

SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT AFRICA

"It's been a great year, with a series of successes for our local and international artists thanks to the incredibly hard-working teams across Europe and Africa," says Lieberberg, who oversaw Sony's growth in Greece and the Czech Republic through acquisitions, including Supraphon, the latter country's longest-established record label. In Germany, Sony "delivered a global viral feat" thanks to Raffaella Carrà, Jaxomy and Agatino Romero's collaboration, "Pedro." Sony also opened the recording complex ONE Studios in Amsterdam. Artist Shiva set records in Italy by earning 100 million streams in a week, and Sony established a presence in Accra, Ghana, thanks to a partnership with Crux Global.

**The music industry today in a word** "Culture-driven," Lieberberg says.

Sony Music Entertainment Canada president Shane Carter was part of the team that helped create *I Am: Céline Dion,* the documentary that celebrated international icon **CÉLINE DION**.

IOC/GETTY IMAGES

### Alistair Norbury

PRESIDENT OF U.K., EUROPE AND ASIA-PACIFIC

### Levy Isabella

MANAGING DIRECTOR OF BENELUX AND SCANDINAVIA

BMG

BMG enjoyed a variety of European wins in 2024, with top five debuts on the United Kingdom's Official Albums Chart for bands Soft Play, Travis and The Script, as well as No. 1 bows for British indie-pop band Blossoms and global pop legend Kylie Minogue, whose *Tension* also topped charts in Scotland and Belgium. Norbury cites the most significant recent developments of BMG delivering its repertoire directly to digital platforms (while moving physical distribution to Universal) and dabbling in related fields like film and literature. "We are fully focused on being a global music publisher and recordings business," he says.

**Biggest issue now** "Fair compensation for artists and songwriters in relation to streaming platforms," Norbury says.

Colombia's **FEID** landed in the top 10 of *Billboard*'s year-end 2024 Top Latin Artists chart.

PAUL BERGEN/REDFERNS

**Simon Robson**
PRESIDENT, EUROPE, THE MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA RECORDED MUSIC
WARNER MUSIC GROUP

**Pico Cibelli**
PRESIDENT
WARNER MUSIC ITALY

**Fabian Drebes**
**Doreen Schimk**
CO-PRESIDENTS
WARNER MUSIC CENTRAL EUROPE

**Mark Fry**
PRESIDENT
WARNER MUSIC NORDICS

**Alain Veille**
PRESIDENT
WARNER MUSIC FRANCE

**Niels Walboomers**
PRESIDENT OF RECORDS AND PUBLISHING, BENELUX
WARNER MUSIC GROUP

**Temi Adeniji**
MANAGING DIRECTOR
WARNER MUSIC AFRICA

Warner Music's teams in Europe, Africa, Asia and beyond emphasize "cross-cultural collaborations," Robson says. These include 91 North Records, a joint venture between the label's India and Canada outposts, which Robson says had "strong success" in breaking rapper AR Paisley, Punjabi hip-hop lyricist Chani Nattan and Punjabi-focused producer Gminxer, all of whom are Canadian. Warner Music India and Warner Music Canada have also been working together with Karan Aujla and recently released "Tell Me" with OneRepublic. WMG also launched an Africa Francophone brand emphasizing French-speaking sub-Saharan African artists. "We also recently incorporated Warner Music U.K. into our EMEA [Europe, Middle East and Africa] structure to help further boost creative collaborations and align our artist campaigns," he says.

**Biggest issue now** "Recent IFPI figures showed that global industry growth [in key markets] slowed last year," Robson says. "That means we must be even more focused on innovation, creativity and strategic deal-making to ensure sustainable growth for the future."

**Dickon Stainer**
CHAIRMAN/CEO
UNIVERSAL MUSIC U.K.

"I would like to highlight the incredible work of our U.K. teams, working with our global partners to put great British artistry back at the heart of international culture — in the shape of Lola Young, Sam Fender, The Last Dinner Party and Olivia Dean," Stainer says, "and to prove the lasting value of our labels to long-term artist career-building and storytelling on a global scale." Stainer was named to lead Universal Music U.K. in September 2024, following a long career at UMG, most recently as president/CEO of UMG's global classics and jazz division. He oversees divisions including Island EMI Label Group, Polydor Label Group, Decca Records and the recently formed Audience and Media Division, as well as Abbey Road Studios.

**Biggest issue now** "To be compelling and relevant to audiences who are bombarded with noise and distraction."

## Music Groups: Latin

**Alejandro Duque**
PRESIDENT
WARNER MUSIC LATIN AMERICA

**Guillermo González Arévalo**
PRESIDENT
WARNER MUSIC IBERIA

**Leila Oliveria**
PRESIDENT
WARNER MUSIC BRAZIL

**Tomas Rodriguez**
PRESIDENT
WARNER MUSIC MEXICO AND MEXICAN MUSIC

Warner's regional approach in the last year has focused on new artist development across the board. Argentine artist Yami Safdie's track "En Otra Vida" charted in over 20 countries; Venezuela's Elena Rose not only broke out in multiple countries, but her "Caracas en el 2000" became an anthem in her home country; Danny Ocean's "Imagínate" soared on Spotify's global charts; and Colombia's Blessd amassed millions of monthly listeners. Warner also struck deals with Puerto Rico's CLARENT, Dominican provocateur Tokisha and partnerships with label Street Mob Records that include rising regional Mexican artists like Armenta, Clave Especial and Calle 24. Warner Music Brazil opened a new headquarters and a creative hub in Rio de Janeiro, together with Warner Chappell Music Brazil and ADA Brazil. "We've continued to prove ourselves an instrumental force in developing the voices that are shaping the future of Latin music," Duque says.

**Biggest issue now** "Music is still extremely undervalued compared with other forms of entertainment," Duque says.

**Jesús López**
CHAIRMAN/CEO
UNIVERSAL MUSIC LATIN AMERICA & IBERIAN PENINSULA

**Alfredo Delgadillo**
PRESIDENT/CEO
UNIVERSAL MUSIC MEXICO

**Manuel Peña**
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF ANDEAN, CENTRAL AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN
UNIVERSAL MUSIC

**Paulo Lima**
PRESIDENT
UNIVERSAL MUSIC BRAZIL

**Luis Estrada**
PRESIDENT OF SOUTHERN CONE
UNIVERSAL MUSIC ARGENTINA

Universal Music Group's focus on artist development resulted in back-to-back best new artist wins at the Latin Grammys in 2023 (Joaquina) and 2024 (Ela Taubert). The company's global approach was also evident in Colombia's Feid, who landed in the top 10 of *Billboard*'s year-end 2024 Top Latin Artists chart, while Karol G's 2023 set, *Mañana Será Bonito*, was the fourth most streamed album globally on Spotify in 2024. Another Colombian, Morat, wrapped a 24-date stadium tour; in Brazil, UMG's artists included chart-toppers Felipe e Rodrigo, Lauana Prado and Henriquez & Juliano; and in Spain, Lola Índigo was Spotify's top female artist for 2024.

**Biggest issue now** "Keeping the artist-centric model to protect the rights of artists, composers and music workers, as well as fair reward for real artists and real music," López says.

**Afo Verde**
CHAIRMAN/CEO
**Maria Fernández**
EXECUTIVE VP/COO
SONY MUSIC LATIN-IBERIA
**Fernando Cabral**
CEO/EXECUTIVE VP OF TICKETING OPERATIONS, LATIN AMERICA
SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT BRAZIL
**Juan Alfonso Sanchez**
SENIOR VP/CFO
SONY MUSIC LATIN-IBERIA
**Jose Maria Barbat**
PRESIDENT
SONY MUSIC IBERIA
**Melissa Exposito**
PRESIDENT
SONY MUSIC LATIN, CENTRAL AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN
**Roberto López**
PRESIDENT
SONY MUSIC MEXICO

Sony had a phenomenal year in Latin music. After topping the Hot Latin Albums chart with *Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran*, Shakira's tour of the same name also made history by ruling Billboard Boxscore's Top Tours ranking for February (the first for a solo female Latin artist), repeated the feat for March and sold out a record number of stadiums in Mexico City. Rauw Alejandro debuted at No. 1 on the Top Latin Albums chart and No. 6 on the Billboard 200 with *Cosa Nuestra*, and newcomers Ca7riel y Paco Amoroso's NPR *Tiny Desk* performance was the most successful of 2024, with over 30 million YouTube views. Other newcomers who crossed the threshold toward stardom include Colombia's Kapo, Mexico's Oscar Maydón and Argentina's Emilia.

**The music business today in a word** "*Un lindo quilombo* [A nice mess]," Verde says.

# Music Groups: Australasia

**Andrew Chan**
MANAGING DIRECTOR, GREATER CHINA
SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT
**Vanessa Picken**
CHAIR/CEO
SONY MUSIC AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND
**Shridhar Subramaniam**
PRESIDENT OF CORPORATE STRATEGY AND MARKET DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST
SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT
**Vinit Thakkar**
MANAGING DIRECTOR, INDIA
SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

Sony Music's operations in Australasia scored several big wins in the past 18 months. It acquired DRM New Zealand for The Orchard. The Australia-New Zealand division of the merchandising company Ceremony of Roses expanded operations in the Asia Pacific region and is now working with over 30 international tours. The company created Sony Music Masterworks Australia and New Zealand, a live-music and experiential division of SME that successfully staged Lightscape, Dark Spectrum and Jurassic World Exhibition, as well as a sold-out film/orchestral performance of *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. Sony also signed Angus & Julia Stone, Gang of Youths and Sydney electronic trio Mansionair.

**Biggest issue now** "To thrive in today's diverse and decentralized music landscape," Picken says, "artists and companies must adapt, embrace emerging technologies and build stronger, more direct connections with their audiences."

**Chris Gobalakrishna**
COO, WARNER MUSIC ASIA; CFO, ASIA PACIFIC, RECORDED MUSIC
WARNER MUSIC/RECORDED MUSIC
**Dan Rosen**
PRESIDENT OF RECORDS AND PUBLISHING, AUSTRALASIA
WARNER MUSIC GROUP/RECORDED MUSIC AND PUBLISHING
**Jay Mehta**
MANAGING DIRECTOR
WARNER MUSIC INDIA AND SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION
**Brayden Crossley**
SENIOR VP OF MARKETING, WARNER MUSIC ASIA
WARNER MUSIC/RECORDED MUSIC

"Warner Music Australasia lives by its goal," Rosen says, "to take our local artists global and make our global artists local." Among the success stories are New Zealand band Balu Brigada, which hit No. 1 on the Alternative Airplay chart in the United States with its track "So Cold" and is touring the world with Twenty One Pilots. Recent Australian signing Esha Tewari is already selling out shows for her first U.S. solo tour, and Oliver Cronin has had many of his tracks go viral across the world, including in India, the Philippines and Germany. Australia and New Zealand are also breakout markets for Teddy Swims, Benson Boone, Maisie Peters and Charli xcx, according to Rosen.

**Biggest issue now** "As an industry," Rosen says, "we need to harness the benefits of technology and minimize the potential harms to ensure value is returned to our artists, songwriters and rights holders."

**Matt Gudinski**
CEO
MUSHROOM GROUP

As costs rise across the music ecosystem, creating new business challenges, Mushroom Group keeps evolving. Led by Gudinski, the Melbourne, Australia, independent music company saw one of its "most significant achievements" in 2024 by consolidating its rights companies under the Mushroom Music banner, including recording, publishing and neighboring rights activities. "Additionally, we've experienced substantial international growth across the Mushroom Group," Gudinski says, "reinforcing our position as a dynamic, forward-thinking company that continues to evolve alongside the ever-changing music industry."

**The music business today in a word** "Competitive, but it's an exciting time as we enter a new generation where more people than ever are immersed in music."

SCOTT LEGATO/GETTY IMAGES

New Zealand duo **BALU BRIGADA** reached No. 1 in March on Alternative Airplay with "So Cold" and is touring the world with Twenty One Pilots.

### Katsumi Kuroiwa
CEO

**AVEX**

### Brandon Silverstein
CEO

**AVEX MUSIC GROUP**

The biggest story at Avex this year was the launch of Avex Music Group, a U.S.-based entity led by S10 Entertainment CEO Silverstein that will focus on expanding the global reach of Avex artists and building the company's publishing portfolio, among other endeavors. That deal includes Avex's acquisition of S10 Music Publishing's song catalog and an additional stake in S10 Management. Meanwhile, Avex boy band One or Eight reached No. 1 on *Billboard Japan*'s Heatseekers Songs chart with "Don't Tell Nobody," while producer-writer Grant contributed to eight tracks on Tate McRae's 2025 Billboard 200 chart-topper, *So Close to What.*

**Biggest issue now** "As the business environment surrounding artists continues to evolve in the global market, it is increasingly important to invest across a wide range of areas," Kuroiwa says. "In order to do so, having strong local partner companies is essential."

### Cussion Pang
EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN

### Ross Liang
CEO

**TENCENT MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT**

"Our company's music content ecosystem continues to gain vitality," Pang says. In 2024, TME expanded beyond licensing into music events and artist merchandise. The company also launched three offline events: Tencent Music Entertainment Awards, WaveMusic Awards and QQ Music Super Live. Enhancements to its platforms — QQ Music, Kugou Music and Kuwo Music — helped TME's subscribers grow 13.4% to 121 million, including more than 10 million Super VIP subscribers. "Our dual-engine content-and-platform strategy [creates] a virtuous cycle of growth," Liang adds. (TME is a *Billboard* licensee in China.)

### Timothy Xu
CHAIRMAN/CEO

**UNIVERSAL MUSIC GREATER CHINA**

### Calvin Wong
CEO

**UNIVERSAL MUSIC SOUTHEAST ASIA**

SENIOR VP OF ASIA

**UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP**

### Devraj Sanyal
CHAIRMAN/CEO

**UNIVERSAL MUSIC INDIA AND SOUTH ASIA**

SENIOR VP OF STRATEGY, ASIA PACIFIC, MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA

**UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP**

### Naoshi Fujikura
PRESIDENT/CEO

**UNIVERSAL MUSIC JAPAN**

### Sean Warner
PRESIDENT

**UNIVERSAL MUSIC AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND**

Growth, the expansion of local content and blossoming partnerships are some of the high points of Universal Music's operations in Asia and Australasia over the past 18 months. Universal Music Japan reported 11 consecutive years of revenue growth. The China business nurtured partnerships with artists such as Jay Chou (the only Chinese-language artist ever to reach No. 1 on IFPI's Global Albums chart). The India company achieved a global hit with "Big Dawgs" from Hanumankind and Kalmi, and the Australasian affiliate is undergoing changes as well — part of a mission to break artists on a global stage.

**Biggest issue now** "One of our biggest challenges in Japan is maintaining the market despite the population decline, especially among younger generations," Fujikura says. "To sustain growth, we need to implement strategies that prevent the market from shrinking. Key efforts include expanding the senior user base, increasing revenue per user and developing overseas markets."

## Streaming

### Gitte Bendzulla
COO

### Nigel Harding
VP OF ARTIST RELATIONS

### Pedro Kurtz
DIRECTOR OF CONTENT AND OPERATIONS, AMERICAS

**DEEZER**

Harding says that Deezer remains a pioneer in music streaming; he cites the company's strides toward fairer remuneration (involving both recording and publishing rights) through Deezer's Artist Centric Payment System initiative. Deezer is focused on fans, too, with its Deezer Flow wheel that personalizes music recommendations based on users' tastes and features like the Deezer Shaker and discovery programs including Deezer Next. Plus, it's offering exclusive live experiences like Purple Door, Listening Sessions and rooftop sessions that provide fans intimate access to artists. "These innovations combine technology, engagement and exclusivity to create deeper connections between fans, music and artists," Harding says.

**Biggest issue now** "The rise of AI-generated content flooding streaming platforms. To address this, Deezer has developed a tool to tag AI-generated content, improving transparency for users and protecting creators' rights," Harding says. "We've already discovered that over 10% of the tracks delivered daily to the platform are AI-generated and, to safeguard creators, this content will be excluded from algorithmic recommendations."

### Dan Chalmers
DIRECTOR OF EUROPE, THE MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA

**YOUTUBE MUSIC**

### Lizzie Dickson
HEAD OF MUSIC

**YOUTUBE U.K.**

### Sandra Jimenez
HEAD OF MUSIC FOR LATIN AMERICA AND U.S. LATIN

### Paul Smith
MANAGING DIRECTOR, ASIA PACIFIC

**YOUTUBE MUSIC**

Reaching a new milestone of 125 million subscribers to YouTube Music and Premium, the platform's ad-free video tier, was a highlight of the past year, Chalmers says. "We added 25 million in the past year alone, outpacing industry trends and reinforcing our role as a major revenue driver for the music business." As global subscription growth slowed slightly in 2024, YouTube Music, which accounted for 10.1% of the 818 million subscriptions worldwide, according to MIDiA Research, was the only major subscription service to post accelerated subscriber growth compared with 2023.

**Biggest issue now** "Ensuring that people can turn their artistry into sustainable careers and cut through the clutter," Chalmers says. "Artists need more than just streams or views; they need a strategy for visibility, engagement and monetization. They need the tools to build deep, lasting connections with fans."

Universal Music Group China continues its partnership with Taiwanese mando-pop star **JAY CHOU** and his JVR Music label.

LI CHAO/PADDOCKER/NURPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES

Japanese duo **YOASOBI** played the 2024 Coachella and Lollapalooza festivals before headlining Radio City Music Hall in New York.

DANA JACOBS/GETTY IMAGES

**Paul Firth**
DIRECTOR OF GLOBAL MUSIC INDUSTRY
**Rocío Guerrero**
HEAD OF MUSIC, LATIN-IBERIA
**Laura Lukanz**
HEAD OF MUSIC, U.K.
**John Murphy**
HEAD OF MUSIC, CANADA
**AMAZON MUSIC**

Building on its success in music streaming, Amazon officially integrated “Audible’s unparalleled catalog of audiobooks” into the app for users in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada before then expanding into Australia, New Zealand and France, Firth says. “This launch really solidifies our position as an all-audio destination for subscribers across music, podcasts and audiobooks and was my highlight of 2024,” he says. The platform is also trying to help artists get discovered. “In order to have a thriving music scene, there needs to be a consistent flow of exciting new artists, and they need the opportunity to find audiences around the world,” he adds. “Both our Breakthrough and Artists To Watch programs are designed to provide this support.”

**The music business today in a word** “Fan-centric,” Firth says.

**Georges Fornay**
DEPUTY CEO
**Dan Mackta**
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF NORTH AMERICA AND NORTHERN EUROPE
**QOBUZ**

Paris-based audiophile streaming service Qobuz achieved significant milestones in the past year, Mackta says, “including our expansion into Japan, the launch of the Studio Student plan and Qobuz Connect. With the U.S. now our leading market, Qobuz has solidified its status as a global company. These achievements reflect our commitment to delivering a unique and deep music experience and to strengthen our position as the go-to platform for music lovers and audiophiles worldwide.” In March, Qobuz became the first streaming company to publicly release the per-streaming royalty rate it pays to rate holders. The all-in rate, which covers both recorded music and publishing, works out to $18.73 for every 1,000 streams.

**Biggest issue now** “Building a fair and sustainable streaming model that ensures all artists receive proper compensation and have equal opportunities to reach their audience,” Mackta says.

**Matt Gralen**
PRESIDENT
**Sofia Ilyas**
CHIEF COMMUNITY OFFICER
**THE BEATPORT GROUP**

One of the most significant achievements at Beatport has been the company’s investment in expanding its infrastructure. “By adding a chief community officer role —my role — and a dedicated team to focus on fostering community within the electronic music space, we are able to support grassroots organizations that champion diversity, many of which are volunteer-led and often overlooked despite being a crucial part of the music ecosystem,” Ilyas says. The latest recipients of Beatport’s Diversity + Parity Fund include Change the Beat, Last Night a DJ Saved My Life, One Off Traks, Other Village People, Saffron and We Are Moving the Needle.

**Biggest issue now** “The industry faces several challenges, but one of the most pressing is how artists navigate their careers in a rapidly changing digital landscape,” Ilyas says. “Many artists today seek more autonomy and direct ways to connect with their fans, but the pressure to constantly engage on social media has become overwhelming.”

**Emmy Lovell**
GLOBAL HEAD OF MUSIC
**Ama Walton**
SENIOR VP OF CONTENT PARTNERSHIPS/DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL
**SOUNDCLOUD**

SoundCloud has partnered with popular club Hï Ibiza in Spain “for a season-long residency that’ll bring James Hype, Meduza and Hannah Laing to one of the biggest stages in electronic music,” Lovell says. “As Hï Ibiza’s first-ever brand partnership in its 10-year history, this is a massive moment that reinforces SoundCloud as a trailblazing platform where global dance music movements are born.” Additionally, Ascending, the artist development program designed to boost upcoming artists, continues to drive real results, with select artists seeing a 60% or more spike in followers. “Ensuring our platform remains a launchpad for emerging talent is something I care deeply about,” Lovell adds, “and with these milestones, we’re making it clear: SoundCloud is the place where artists can break through the noise.”

**The music business today in a word** “Unpredictable,” Lovell says.

**Rachel Newman**
GLOBAL HEAD OF EDITORIAL AND CONTENT
**Anjali Malhotra**
GLOBAL DIRECTOR OF CLASSICAL
**Juan Paz**
GLOBAL HEAD OF LATIN MUSIC BUSINESS
**APPLE MUSIC**

Apple Music’s global footprint was strengthened by a branding initiative that saw the creation of the Apple Music 100 Best Albums and by the addition of Tokyo to the company’s Apple Music Studio network. “This past year has seen us really lean into what we do best,” Newman says. “The thing that has always differentiated us is our editorial strength across the world.” In constructing the 100 best albums, “we pulled together an enormous editorial feature that [included] votes from our Apple Music editorial teams across the world,” she adds, “as well as a range of other expert opinions — musicians, songwriters, producers, managers and music journalists.” As for the Tokyo studio, “Japan is such an important market for us, and bringing an Apple Music Radio studio online there expanded our Apple Music Studio network to seven studio spaces worldwide.”

**Andy Sloan-Vincent**
HEAD OF GLOBAL MUSIC PROGRAMS
**Manuela Wurm**
HEAD OF GLOBAL EDITORIAL
**Kossy Ng**
HEAD OF MUSIC, SOUTHEAST ASIA, HONG KONG AND TAIWAN
**JungJoo Park**
HEAD OF MUSIC, KOREA
**SPOTIFY**

Spotify has been leaning into superfan communities more, and this past year, the company’s work with South Korean boy band Seventeen illustrates that determination to “build deeper connections with their fans around the world,” as Park puts it. That included a first-ever countdown page and listening parties in Indonesia, as well as in-person fan experiences at the group’s shows in Seoul; New York; Tokyo; Manila, Philippines; and Jakarta, Indonesia, among others. “It was an incredible journey that not only brought fans closer to the group,” Park says, “but also helped boost their global presence and streaming numbers on Spotify.”

**The music business today in a word** “If we had to sum up the music business today in two words, they’d be ‘innovative’ and ‘ever-evolving,’ ” Park says. “The industry is rapidly embracing new technologies, and we’re seeing a surge in artist-driven content that pushes creative boundaries.”

British neo-soul singer **OLIVIA DEAN** has been touring Australia and will open for Sabrina Carpenter at Madison Square Garden in October.

GUS STEWART/REDFERNS

# Labels & Distributors

### Rebecca Allen

PRESIDENT, AUDIENCE AND MEDIA DIVISION

**UNIVERSAL MUSIC U.K.**

Universal Music U.K. combined its leading labels under Island EMI Label Group and Polydor Label Group last year and launched an audience and media division helmed by Allen to work across artists and labels. She will continue collaborating with some of the acts she aided in her former EMI role alongside Jo Charrington, including English singer Olivia Dean. Allen describes Dean as "the definition of a world-class artist," noting, "We saw just how hard Olivia and her manager, Emily [Braham], worked to connect with audiences beyond the U.K. Her Coachella and Glastonbury moments, for me, were a huge highlight in 2024."

**Biggest issue now** "The lack of funding for the arts in schools. Our pipeline of talent into this industry, into the creative industries, will be decimated without a real investment into young people and creativity. The funding crisis for the arts in schools needs to be addressed, and as an industry, we must step up and play a role in this."

### Tricia Arnold

EXECUTIVE VP OF GLOBAL ARTIST AND LABEL SERVICES AND SALES

### Prashant Bahadur

EXECUTIVE VP/HEAD OF STRATEGY

### Chris Manning

MANAGING DIRECTOR, U.K. AND EUROPE

**THE ORCHARD**

Emphasizing The Orchard's global reach, Arnold points to Japan's YOASOBI playing pivotal shows in the United States, including appearances at the 2024 Coachella and Lollapalooza festivals and a sold-out Radio City Music Hall gig in New York last August. In addition, Mexican superstar Peso Pluma's second album, *Exodo*, charted at No. 5 on the Billboard 200 and No. 1 on the Top Latin Albums chart and had the biggest ever debut for a Mexican artist on Spotify. The Orchard also celebrated the No. 20 debut on the Billboard 200 for Mexico's Tito Double P's *Incomodo* (the album later peaked at No. 11), BINI becoming the first Filipino winner of best Asia act at the MTV Europe Music Awards and British singer RAYE winning six BRIT Awards, scoring three Grammy noms and putting on show-stopping performances at the Grammys and Academy Awards.

**The music business today in a word** "Global, in the truest sense of the word," Arnold says.

### Bang Si-Hyuk

CHAIRMAN

### Jason Jaesang Lee

CEO

**HYBE**

### Jonghyun Kah

CEO

**HYBE LATIN AMERICA**

### Young Jae Shin

PRESIDENT

### Yoo Jin Oh

GM

**HYBE 360**

While HYBE boasts an artist roster with BTS (and its members' solo releases), Tomorrow X Together and NewJeans, its global expansion gets a boost from an unlikely source: AI. Supertone, an AI audio company that HYBE acquired in 2023, launched virtual pop group SYNDI8 and enhanced Tomorrow X Together's concert videos with multilingual pronunciation technology. Lee thinks that AI benefits musicians, but its regulation isn't keeping pace with technological advances. "I believe the future of the industry will be shaped by how deliberately and appropriately we design the utilization and regulation of technology," he says.

**Biggest issue now** "The music industry as a whole is still undervalued," Lee says. "A simple calculation reveals this: The hourly cost of streaming is remarkably low compared with other forms of entertainment and services. It affects not only the revenue of companies but also the people who work in the music industry — from creators to the staff on the ground — who aren't being compensated for their true worth."

### Kimberly Bedoya

HEAD OF LATIN MARKETING

**ROC NATION DISTRIBUTION**

The recently launched Roc Nation Distribution "has provided a solution for indie artists to distribute their music globally," Bedoya says. "We've significantly strengthened our international presence through strategic partnerships and collaborations and successfully executed global marketing campaigns for high-profile music artists." That includes Dominican rapper-singer Yailin La Más Viral, whose viral song "Bing Bong" trended at No. 1 on YouTube across multiple markets, Bedoya says, and "demonstrated our expertise in managing large-scale international initiatives and deepened our relationships with global partners and media platforms across Latin America, Europe and North America."

**The music business today in a word** "Innovative. The music business today is transforming, driven by rapid technological advances, new platforms and the shift of consumer behaviors."

### Louis Bloom

PRESIDENT, ISLAND EMI LABEL GROUP

**UNIVERSAL MUSIC U.K.**

Not even halfway through 2025, Bloom already calls it "Chappell Roan's year." After Roan picked up two BRIT Awards in March, her song "Pink Pony Club" ruled the Official Singles Chart in the United Kingdom for two weeks, "proving that Chappell's music is utterly timeless," he adds. Meanwhile, Roan's 2023 album, *The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess*, has spent 41 weeks in the top 10 on the Official Albums Chart. Bloom says "another remarkable achievement" is the *Wicked* soundtrack breaking "the U.K. chart record for the longest consecutive reign at No. 1 on the Official Compilations Chart, staying on top for an unprecedented 16 weeks."

**The music business today in a word** "Three words: relentless yet edifying."

### Alec Boateng

**PRESIDENT, 0207 DEF JAM**

**UNIVERSAL MUSIC U.K.**

Last summer, veteran electronic duo Chase & Status and rapper Stormzy teamed up for “Backbone,” which hit No. 1 on the Official Singles Chart in the United Kingdom. “Seeing this song [a joint release with EMI] have international reach is amazing, and obviously, the fact it was such a huge No. 1 in the U.K. is something we’re really proud of,” Boateng says. “Given the range of choices facing an artist nowadays,” he continues, 0207 Def Jam is focused on providing “bespoke individual services of quality to each artist that we work with.” In the music industry now, “everyone has a different time in which the moment happens,” according to Boateng. “And patience is required for those who take a longer time to get there.”

**The music business today in a word** “Unpredictable.”

### Joseph Chang

**CO-CEO**

**KAKAO ENTERTAINMENT**

### Daniel Jang
### Dmitry YJ Tak

**CO-CEOs**

**SM ENTERTAINMENT**

“Over the past few months, Kakao Entertainment has solidified its position as a key player in the K-pop scene,” Chang says. Finding a new twist on the K-pop model, Kakao’s joint venture with SM Entertainment launched a five-member British boy band, dearALICE, which reached No. 2 on the U.K. Official Physical Singles Chart with its debut single, “Ariana.” Both companies had successful world tours, too. Kakao’s IVE staged its first large-scale world tour and played to 420,000 fans in 28 cities across the globe, according to SM. SM’s aespa did its second world tour from June 2024 to March 2025, staging 43 concerts in 28 cities.

**The music business today in a word** “ ‘Boundary-breaking’ is the word that best describes today’s music industry,” Chang says. “The industry is no longer hemmed in by walls of language, nationality, platform or genre.”

### Jo Charrington

**PRESIDENT, CAPITOL RECORDS**

**UNIVERSAL MUSIC U.K.**

### Kieran Thurgood

**EXECUTIVE VP OF GLOBAL MARKETING**

**CAPITOL MUSIC GROUP**

Working closely with U.S. labels — Capitol, Island and Mercury — has paid off in breaking U.K. artists stateside, Charrington says, as evidenced by the success of DJ-producer Sammy Virji. “Sammy played Coachella [in April] and is set to play two dates at Brooklyn Mirage in June,” Charrington says, adding that British neo-soul singer Olivia Dean is touring the United States and opening for Sabrina Carpenter at Madison Square Garden in New York in October. For Thurgood, global campaigns for songs by Good Neighbours, Quavo & Lana Del Rey, Ice Spice and Troye Sivan have all yielded global hits, as well as his team’s work on the meteoric ascent of Doechii, whose latest hit, “Anxiety,” just topped the global Spotify charts, “with 70% of consumption originating outside the U.S.,” he says.

**Biggest issue now** “Pointedly, achieving optimal success for our artists and portfolio of labels fundamentally relies on aggressively, but authentically, driving and harnessing the power of superfandom,” Thurgood says.

### Brianne Deslippe

**SENIOR VP OF MARKETING**

**BIG LOUD RECORDS**

At Big Loud, “we scaled our international business rapidly this year with aggressive global marketing efforts, promotional events, creative social and digital campaigns, multiformat radio No. 1s and nearly 250 tour dates and festivals,” Deslippe says. Morgan Wallen’s One Night at a Time World Tour spanned 10 countries and 87 shows, while other Big Loud artists including Stephen Wilson Jr., Dylan Gossett, Ashley Cooke, Charles Wesley Godwin and Kashus Culpepper experienced growth in global market reception, driving surges in streaming and audience numbers. Still, Deslippe says of the obstacles in marketing rising talents, “Discoverability is a constant challenge as new artists fight for attention in overcrowded spaces.”

**The music business today in a word** “Evolving.”

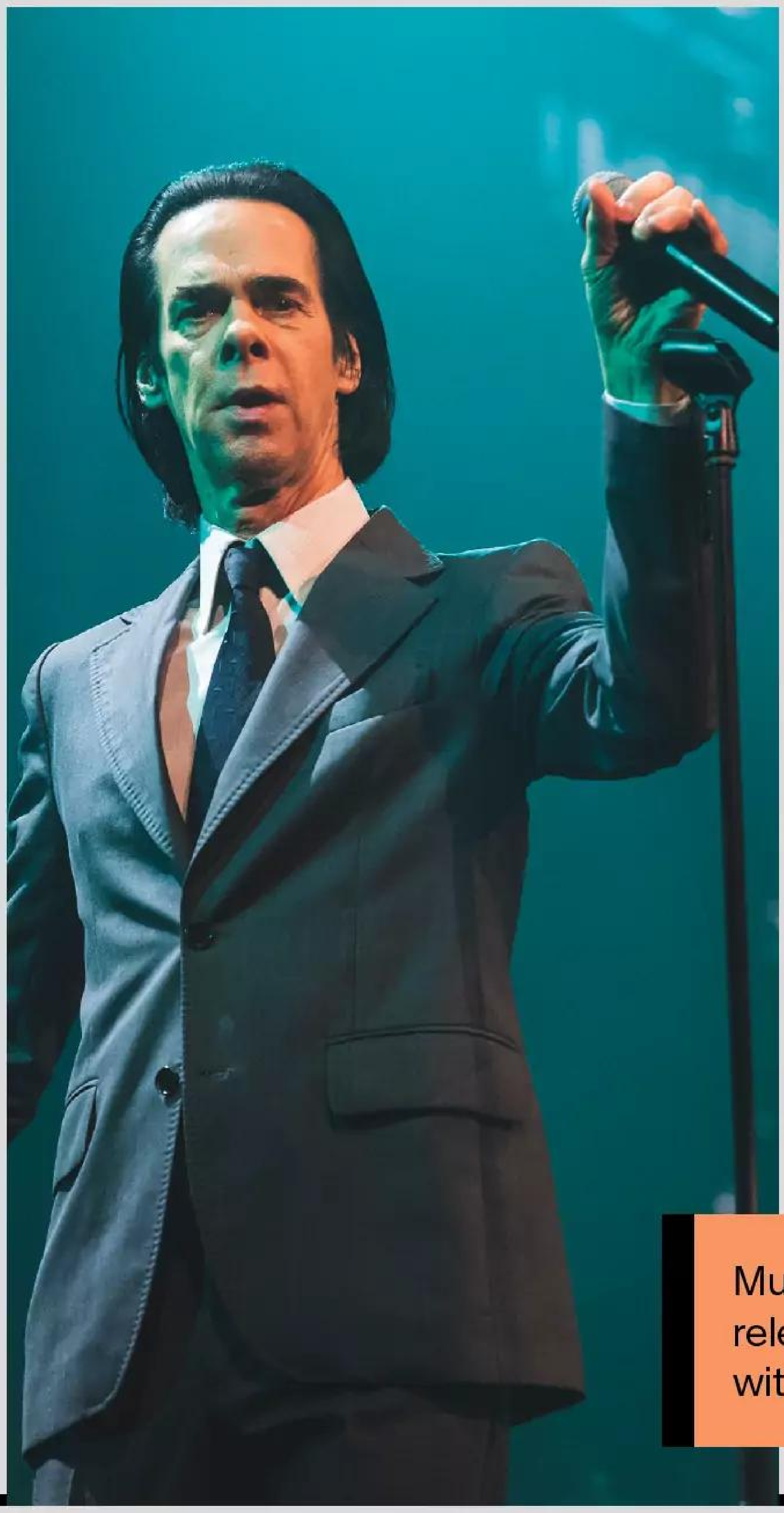
### Sipho Dlamini

**PRESIDENT/MANAGING DIRECTOR**

**GAMMA.**

Dlamini and his team signed over 35 distribution deals across Africa and the Middle East, establishing the company’s presence in the latter region by producing Steve Harvey’s Open Fire Food Festival in collaboration with BET Africa. He also A&R’d a remixed track by Tamela Mann by bringing in South African *amapiano*/3-step producer Mörda. They also opened gamma.’s first office in Lagos, Nigeria, offering full label services and local representation for its distribution platform Vydia, and formed strategic partnerships with Sol Generation (Kenya’s leading label, owned by Sauti Sol) and Gallo Music Group (South Africa’s oldest and largest independent label).

**The music business today in a word** “Confused.”



Music group [PIAS] is backing the release of **NICK CAVE**’s new album with the Bad Seeds, *Wild God.*

MARIANO REGIDOR/REDFERNS

### Denzyl Feigelson

**CO-FOUNDER/CEO**

**PLATOON**

Last year, Platoon, the Apple-owned artist services, A&R and music distribution company, increased its efforts to provide career-boosting services to acts worldwide by delving into the classical world. These efforts paid off in November, when the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Gustavo Dudamel’s *Fandango* album featuring violinist Anne Akiko Meyers and composer Arturo Márquez won two classical categories at the Latin Grammy Awards, and again in February, when Gabriela Ortiz’s *Revolución Diamantina* with Dudamel and the L.A. Phil spotlighting violinist María Dueñas took home an unprecedented three Grammy Awards, including best orchestral performance.

**Biggest issue now** “There are of course multiple issues and, in turn, opportunities,” Feigelson says. “One that is top of mind is the perception of quick overnight success versus career development.”

### Arthur Fitzgibbon

**MANAGING DIRECTOR, BRAZIL**

### Andrés López-Quiroga

**EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, LATIN IBERIA**

**ONERPM**

“ONErpm has continued to grow and establish itself as a modern label for artists at various stages of their careers,” including local, international and global acts, “demonstrating that our global structure, technology and flexible deal structures benefit both artists and the current industry landscape,” López-Quiroga says. He points to international success with hits like Chance Peña and Andres Castro’s “Vaquero Vaquero,” Chimbala’s “Che Che,” Brytiago’s “Kilerito” and emerging artist Alejo. “Our ability to rapidly adapt to the evolving industry landscape — leveraging our technology, global and organizational structures— and flexible deal structures,” he adds, “has enabled ONErpm to increase its global market share while maintaining a top five position in various markets worldwide.”

**The music business today in a word** “Ever-changing,” López-Quiroga says.

### Kenny Gates

**CO-FOUNDER/CEO**

**[PIAS]**

In October last year, [PIAS] co-founder/CEO Gates and co-founder Michel Lambot sold their remaining shares of the indie label group to Universal Music Group to support their dream of offering truly global distribution services to the independent music community. Six months later, Gates says the partnership has allowed [PIAS] to retain its autonomy and core values while becoming “an added dimension in the UMG ecosystem,” as [PIAS] has continued to demonstrate its commitment to artists through recent successes like Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds’ new album, *Wild God*, and the breakout success of controversial Irish hip-hop act Kneecap.

**Biggest issue now** “Getting access to media and to engaged audiences for truly great and passionate artists is becoming harder and harder as the DSPs and the market generally become ever more overwhelmed with the sheer volume of mediocrity clogging the system.”

### Jonas Haentjes

CEO

**EDEL**

One of the biggest independent music companies in Europe, Edel owns several labels (earMUSIC, dance-focused Kontor Records), a sizable vinyl pressing plant (Optimal Media, which also manufactures CDs, DVDs and books) and a distribution operation. Last year, sales were down 7.7% overall, but with a 3.2% increase in EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization) and strong growth in digital distribution, balanced by a stable manufacturing business. The vinyl business suffers from overcapacity, but "everyone knows us, everyone trusts us, and we're trying to push our process further," Haentjes says.

**Biggest issue now** "We really need to watch out with what we allow the AI companies to do."

### Tor Hansen

CO-FOUNDER/EXECUTIVE

**REDEYE**

### Pelle Eriksson

MANAGING DIRECTOR

**BORDER MUSIC/REDEYE**

As leaders of the Swedish indie distributor Redeye, Hansen and Eriksson have spent the past year streamlining how music from their global label partners reaches fans around the world — from physical products at retailers to DSPs — and focusing on products delivered to stores in Scandinavia. "We have intensified our efforts on spreading the news, and the music, from local independent labels we work with throughout the world," Eriksson says. "The key to keep the physical part of the industry alive and well is to continue to offer quality products, vinyl and CD — at fair prices, all to keep the record-buying public happy."

**The music business today in a word** "For the Scandinavia market, I would say, 'Steady,' " Eriksson says. "For Border's international releases, I would say, 'Growing.' "

### Paul Hitchman

COO

### Ben Akinbola

HEAD OF GROWTH

**AWAL**

"Last year, marquee AWAL artists like Jungle [in the United Kingdom] and The Beaches [in Canada] — winners of group of the year honors at the BRIT Awards and Juno Awards, respectively — reached new heights in their careers internationally. Building off those international successes, we now also have local artists charting on every inhabitable continent, with a presence on the ground in over 15 markets," Akinbola says, pointing to successes in South Africa with Yanga Chief, the Philippines with Zae and India with Loka. "All of our successes are ultimately the combination of AWAL's unique model for artist development, our partnership with local Sony Music teams in growth markets and, most importantly, an incredible roster of independent artists who continuously push creative boundaries."

**The music business today in a word** "Democratization," Akinbola says.

### Ed Howard
### Briony Turner

CO-PRESIDENTS

**ATLANTIC RECORDS U.K.**

### Samantha Strum

DIRECTOR OF GLOBAL MARKETING

**ATLANTIC RECORDS**

Thanks to the campaign waged by Charli xcx and Atlantic, 2024 became known in multiple markets as the year of Brat Summer. "We helped to define culture," Howard says of the campaign's bright green aesthetic that "took over everything from fashion, sports, U.S. politics and beyond." He adds, "Charli is a great example of a long-term artist development. Having signed with Atlantic at just 15, she's had the time and backing to develop with artistic freedom, pushing the boundaries of alternative pop." Looking ahead, Turner is excited about the U.K. signings of Kingfishr and Yaelokre, plus artist Alex Warren, whose "Ordinary" hit No. 1 on the Official Singles Chart in the United Kingdom.

**Biggest issue now** "We increasingly face challenges in maintaining and expanding our [U.K.] export reach due to a combination of political, economic and competitive factors," Howard says.

### Manu Kaushish

PRESIDENT OF INTERNATIONAL

**CREATE MUSIC GROUP**

In June 2024, Create Music Group reached a significant milestone when it received a $160 million investment from Chicago-based private equity firm Flexpoint Ford. The move elevated CMG to "unicorn" status after getting a $1 billion valuation. The capital allowed CMG to acquire the catalogs of deadmau5 and his label, mau5trap. Founded in 2015, CMG includes marketing agency Flighthouse and independent music distribution platform Engine Label, which handled Ye and Ty Dolla $ign's Billboard 200 No. 1 *Vultures 1*. "We are poised for continued aggressive expansion in 2025, empowering and onboarding even more international artists and labels," Kaushish says.

**Biggest issue now** "How to adequately and fairly compensate music creators in a world of ever-changing streaming royalties and algorithms, especially with the dominance and power that DSPs and their stakeholders have right now."

### Joe Kentish

PRESIDENT

**WARNER RECORDS U.K.**

### Luke Armitage

SENIOR VP OF GLOBAL MARKETING

**WARNER RECORDS (EXPORT MARKETING)**

Warner Records delivered a strong performance in the United Kingdom and globally in 2024. Dua Lipa and Coldplay headlined Glastonbury, which was streamed worldwide for the first time. With *Radical Optimism*, Lipa also attained "massive global success with [over] 3 billion streams and a sold-out global tour," while Coldplay's *Moon Music* "became the fastest-selling album of 2024 by a British act," Kentish says. Also of note: Linkin Park's *From Zero* comeback album notched No. 1 debuts in multiple countries including the United Kingdom, Australia and France; Benson Boone landed a No. 1 on the U.K. Official Singles Chart with "Beautiful Things"; and Teddy Swims ushered in 2025 with his first No. 1 album in Australia, *I've Tried Everything but Therapy (Part 2)*.

**Biggest issue now** "On a broader level, it's the decoupling of artists and their narratives from their songs," Kentish says. "The way music is consumed today makes it increasingly challenging to tell important new stories through those channels."

### Lyn Koppe

EXECUTIVE VP OF GLOBAL CATALOG

### Charlie Stanford

SENIOR VP OF INTERNATIONAL, COMMERCIAL MUSIC GROUP

**SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT**

Sony Music's global catalog team is "truly exceptional and inspiring," says Koppe, who manages the expansive Legacy Recordings/Sony Music catalog. "With the privilege of overseeing some of the most iconic music from the last 100-plus years, our team focuses on innovating, sharing learnings and developing best practices among countries as trusted collaborators." Meanwhile, Stanford says his purview across all of Sony Music's international catalog continued to expand thanks to several of the company's major acquisitions. "As always," Koppe adds, "our passion for music, our artists and their fans remains the top priority guiding our strategies around the world."

**Biggest issue now** "Fans have a lot of choice," Stanford says, "so from a catalog perspective, we must focus on developing unique and authentic ways to cut through and help audiences discover decades of incredible music from around the world."

## THE HOTTEST HITS OUTSIDE THE U.S.*

| RANK | TITLE | ARTIST |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | "Die With a Smile" | Lady Gaga & Bruno Mars |
| 2 | "APT." | Rosé & Bruno Mars |
| 3 | "Birds of a Feather" | Billie Eilish |
| 4 | "Espresso" | Sabrina Carpenter |
| 5 | "Beautiful Things" | Benson Boone |
| 6 | "Gata Only" | FloyyMenor x Cris MJ |
| 7 | "Lose Control" | Teddy Swims |
| 8 | "Too Sweet" | Hozier |
| 9 | "Si Antes Te Hubiera Conocido" | Karol G |
| 10 | "Please Please Please" | Sabrina Carpenter |

***Billboard*'s Global Excl. U.S. chart tracks the most popular songs based on streaming and sales activity from over 200 territories around the world — excluding the United States — as tracked by Luminate, based on a weighted formula incorporating official-only streams on both subscription and ad-supported tiers of leading audio and video services, plus download sales from top music retailers across the globe. The recap rankings are based on cumulative performance on each respective ranking for charts dated April 20, 2024, through April 12, 2025.

**concord**

CONGRATULATIONS TO
GLOBAL POWER PLAYERS
**FRED GILLHAM**
**JAIME GOUGH**
**KIM FRANKIEWICZ**
**REBECCA BERMAN**
**TINA FUNK**

YOUR WORK IS A POWERFUL
REMINDER THAT THE
POTENTIAL OF INDIE MUSIC
IS TRULY LIMITLESS.

### Ben Larsen

EXECUTIVE VP OF INTERNATIONAL

**INTERSCOPE GEFFEN A&M**

"Being given license to reimagine how we develop artist careers globally and how we do business around the world has meant that my team and I are able to evolve the partnerships with our UMG affiliates to greater effect," Larsen says. That freedom played an integral role in paving a two-way-street — creative and execution — that delivered "amazing results" over the last year. As examples, Larsen cites Lady Gaga, Kendrick Lamar and Playboi Carti, who had "some of the biggest global rollouts in years, topping album and singles charts." Then to also see Gracie Abrams "break through with a huge No. 1 single ["That's So True"] all over the world is exciting," Larsen adds, "and sets the tone for what's to come."

**The music business today in a word** "Relentless."

### Federico Lauria

FOUNDER/CEO

**DALE PLAY**

The Argentina-based company made impressive gains across its divisions: Dale Play Management, Dale Play Records and Dale Play Live. On the management side, Lauria's marquee client Duki became the first rapper — and only Argentine artist — to sell out Madrid's Santiago Bernabéu Stadium. Meanwhile, Lauria says Dale Play Live sold over 1 million tickets in Argentina alone during 2024, promoting shows for global acts Travis Scott and Karol G, to name a few. Furthermore, Dale Play Records — home to artists like Cazzu and Paulo Londra — and Bad Bunny's Rimas Entertainment teamed for a strategic alliance, "playing a key role in developing and amplifying a new wave of Spanish-language urban music around the world," Lauria adds.

**The music business today in a word** "Passion. At least in Dale Play, that's our engine. It's what drives every risk, every idea and every action. Without it, nothing else works."

### Nando Luaces

FOUNDER/CEO

**ALTAFONTE**

Since Sony Music Group's acquisition of Altafonte in January 2024, "we continue to operate independently but have all the financial capacity and know-how to grow in a very competitive and dynamic market," Luaces says. On industry challenges, Luaces emphasizes adapting to technological advances: "AI and the challenge of how to be fair in royalty payments for streaming is the problem of today, and we must solve it," he says. "In order to have a prosperous and larger business, we continue to adapt to changes and technological advances, as has been the history of music for the last 130 years."

**The music business today in a word** "Acceptance. Accept that the world is unstable and changing. Anything can happen."

YBNL Nation artist **ASAKE** sold out London's O2 Arena for the second time last September, becoming only the third Nigerian act to do so, according to the company.

### Roni Maltz Bin

FOUNDER/CEO

**SUA MÚSICA GROUP**

Brazilian indie distributor Sua, known for its focus on independent regional artists, has now begun its "international expansion into the Latin market," Maltz Bin says, noting that the company has plans to launch labels in key territories including Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Mexico in the next 24 months. In December, Sua opened a recording studio and urban music label Único Música in Buenos Aires, Argentina, for emerging talent. The company also hired its first A&R executive in Medellín, Colombia, with plans to launch a label there. "There has never been a time with so many opportunities in the music industry for artists, producers, labels, record companies and entrepreneurs," Maltz Bin says. "We are living in the golden era of the music business."

**Biggest issue now** "The two biggest challenges are the rise of AI-powered tools and the increasing amount of artificial streaming and fraud."

### Martin Mills

CHAIRMAN

### Paul Redding

COO

### Brandon Becker

GLOBAL VP OF STREAMING

**BEGGARS GROUP**

### Jean-Philippe Aline

GM

**BEGGARS FRANCE**

### Ben Beardsworth

MANAGING DIRECTOR

**XL RECORDINGS**

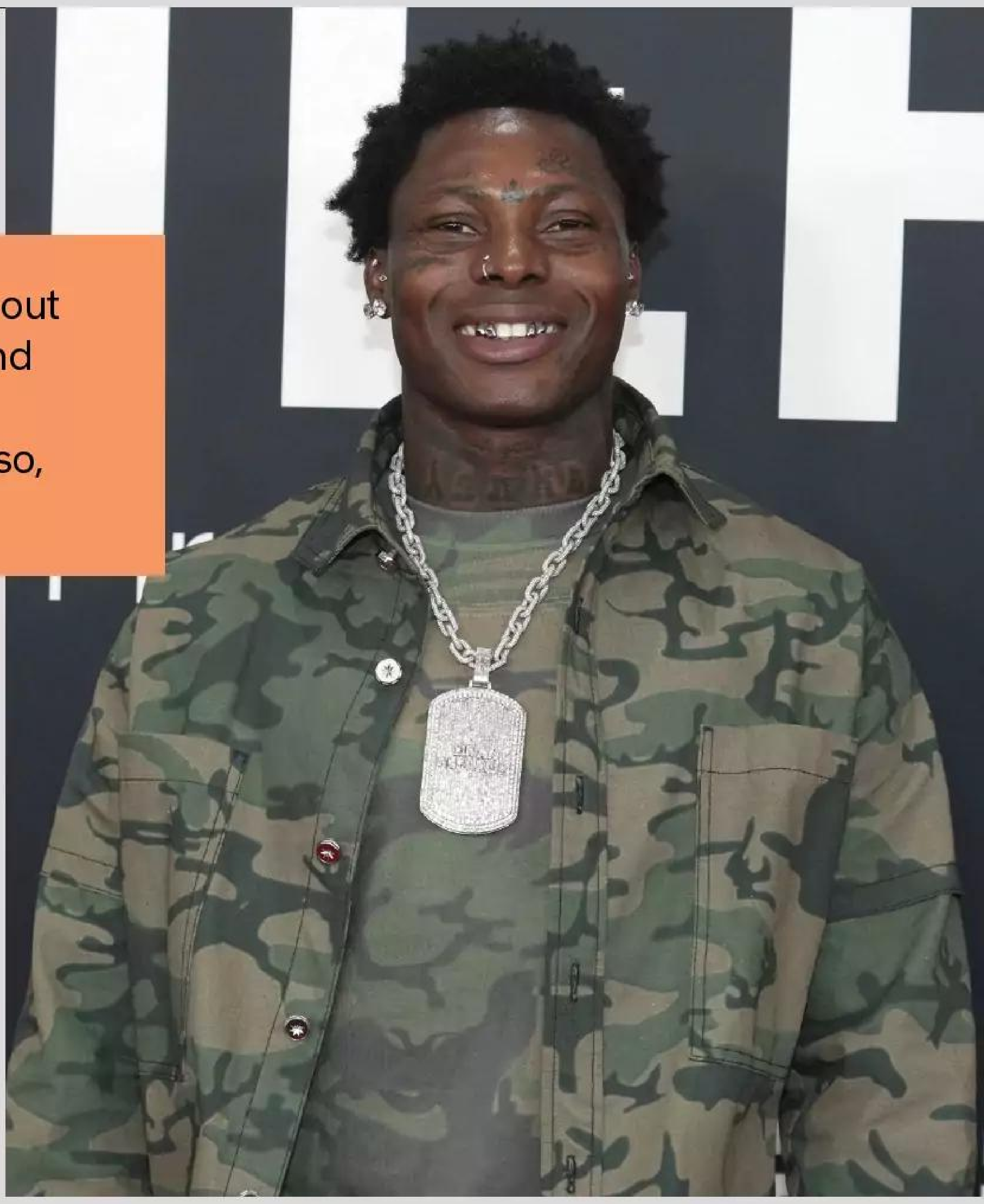
### Caius Pawson

FOUNDER

**YOUNG**

In 2024, XL Recordings worked closely with The Smile, as well as DJ Peggy Gou. "(It Goes Like) Nanana," Gou's debut release for XL, topped singles charts around the globe ahead of the 2024 release of her acclaimed solo album, *I Hear You*. Mills is particularly proud of how Beggars Group also helped take Irish band Fontaines D.C. "to the next level." Last September, the band made its Billboard 200 debut with its fourth album, *Romance* (released on XL Recordings), which peaked at No. 2 on the U.K. Official Albums Chart. Meanwhile, lead single "Starburster" became a top 20 hit on the Alternative and Triple A airplay charts. As Mills says, "It was a major global success story that we are all very proud of."

**Biggest issue** "The biggest issue is money," Mills says. "Commerce and art have always been uncomfortable bedfellows, never more so than now."



### Ben Mortimer

PRESIDENT, POLYDOR LABEL GROUP

**UNIVERSAL MUSIC U.K.**

Mortimer's focus over the last year was "integrating the incredible artist rosters and executive talent at Capitol Records and 0207 Def Jam into the Polydor world." He says, "It's gone remarkably smoothly, which is a testament to all involved." Polydor star Sam Fender also released his *People Watching* album, which channels classic heartland rock; it hit the top of the U.K. Official Albums Chart with 107,000 chart units — the biggest opening week for a British solo act since 2022. Fender will play select stadium shows in the United Kingdom this summer.

**Biggest issue now** "Vying for attention amid the breadth of music from around the world. However, the U.K. has always punched above its weight creatively, and I feel we are on the cusp of a new wave of breakthrough British talent."

### Suhel Nafar

MANAGING DIRECTOR OF WEST ASIA AND NORTH AFRICA

### Jeffrey Yoo

SENIOR VP OF EAST ASIA

### Taeko Saito

SENIOR VP OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGIES, ASIA PACIFIC

**EMPIRE**

"EMPIRE has made significant strides in bridging global music markets, fostering cross-cultural collaborations and amplifying diverse voices," including a "strong foundation in the African music scene," Nafar says, citing as an example Moroccan rapper Dada and Sudanese rapper Soulja recording an Arabic remix of Los Angeles rapper 310babii's 2024 Rhythmic Airplay No. 1 breakout hit, "Soak City (Do It)." And signing some of the biggest acts in South Korea and Southeast Asia like K-pop icon G-Dragon has further cemented "EMPIRE's reputation as a key player in shaping the future of the global music industry," he adds.

**Biggest issue now** "Instead of merely capitalizing on what performs well in the data," Nafar says, "the industry must do better in nurturing and developing talent, ensuring that artistry and innovation remain at the heart of the music business."

JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC

CONGRATULATIONS

# GLOBAL POWER PLAYERS

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### Donny Novakovic

VP OF INTERNATIONAL MARKETING

**DISNEY MUSIC GROUP**

"This year, we brought our storytelling passion to life with exciting global soundtrack campaigns for two highly anticipated films, *Moana 2* and *Mufasa: The Lion King*," Novakovic says, adding that last year, Disney made the soundtracks available in 29 languages, "ensuring that the magic of these stories reaches cultures worldwide." Earlier in 2025, the company introduced the soundtrack to Disney's *Snow White*, "a captivating addition to our repertoire that continues to celebrate the timeless tales that have inspired generations," he says. Novakovic also notes the momentum of pop trio almost monday, which wrapped a sold-out 19-city headlining run through Europe.
**The music business today in a word** "Abundant — overflowing with creativity, talent and opportunity across a constantly expanding global landscape."

### Jamie Oborne

FOUNDER

**DIRTY HIT**

Oborne says that Dirty Hit — the home of a diverse indie-leaning stable of acts, including The 1975, Bleachers, beabadoobee and Saya Gray — spent the past year expanding its global reach with international partnerships and placement on live and digital platforms in different countries. "One highlight has been our efforts in expanding into emerging markets such as Asia and Latin America, where we've seen a growing fan base for our artists," Oborne says. "Through these initiatives, we have strengthened our international business relationships by pushing our artists into new territories and enabling them to connect with a wider audience than ever before."
**Biggest issue now** The streaming model "heavily favors large corporations and major labels, leaving independent artists and smaller labels with a much smaller share of the revenue. As a result, there's an ongoing need for fairer revenue-sharing models, better protection for intellectual property and more support for independent artists to ensure the sustainability of the industry."

### Olamide

FOUNDER/CEO

**YBNL NATION**

"YBNL Nation has made significant strides in expanding our global footprint and solidifying our presence in key international markets," says artist Olamide, who also runs his own company. Asake sold out London's O2 Arena for the second time in September 2024, becoming the third Nigerian artist after Davido and Wizkid to sell out the venue multiple times, according to YBNL Nation. The show was held a month after he released his third album, *Lungu Boy*, which included collaborations with Travis Scott ("Active" hit No. 1 on Billboard U.S. Afrobeats Songs), U.K. artists Central Cee and Stormzy and Brazil's Ludmilla. "MMS" (featuring Wizkid) earned Asake his second Grammy nomination for best African music performance. "Collaborations with international artists and producers have helped bridge the gap between Afrobeats and other genres," he adds, "further establishing our label as a key player in the global music scene."
**The music business today in a word** "Disruptive."

### Alejandra Olea

MANAGING DIRECTOR, AMERICAS

**BELIEVE**

### Andreea Gleeson

CEO

**TUNECORE**

### Romain Vivien

GLOBAL HEAD OF MUSIC/PRESIDENT OF EUROPE

**BELIEVE**

Believe, and subsidiary TuneCore, represent "artists and labels across every genre in local markets all around the world," Vivien says — including about 50 artists who were either nominated for or won awards at some two dozen awards ceremonies worldwide, according to the company. Its strategy of working with local independent labels and producers led to deals with legendary Punjabi label White Hill Music, Krumolo in Southeast Asia and the launch of Playcode, Believe's first local hip-hop imprint. Rising stars that charted internationally in 2024 include Canada's Cheema Y, Germany's Lacazette and Japan's ¥ellow Bucks and Red Eye.
**The music business today in a word** "Dynamic," Vivien says. "This is true across every area of the industry, around how music is created, discovered, consumed and then redefined. This has been powered by the increasing digitalization, which allows for more creation, faster and wider distribution to reach audiences more directly and accurately and for a wider and more diverse artist community."

### Maykel Piron

CO-FOUNDER/CEO

**ARMADA MUSIC GROUP**

For over 20 years, Armada Music co-founder/CEO Piron has remained a driving force in electronic dance music, especially for independent artists. With teams across the United States and sections of Europe, Armada Music Group has been focused on international expansion. The company has expanded its publishing division and doubled the size of its London office. "With teams strategically positioned across Europe, the U.K. and the U.S.," Piron says, "we're able to operate synergistically across markets, providing comprehensive global support for our artists."
**Biggest issue now** "With an overwhelming number of releases dropping each week, cutting through the noise is more challenging than ever, especially in electronic music. Labels must collaborate closely with their artists to tailor strategies specific to their needs — a one-size-fits-all approach simply doesn't cut it."

### Jeff Remedios

PRESIDENT OF STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

### Mike Alexander

EXECUTIVE VP OF GLOBAL MARKETING STRATEGY

**REPUBLIC COLLECTIVE**

### Steven Rowen

SENIOR VP OF GLOBAL MARKETING STRATEGY

**ISLAND RECORDS**

### Zoe Briggs

VP OF GLOBAL MARKETING STRATEGY

**REPUBLIC RECORDS/MERCURY RECORDS**

### Myra deCastro-Yournett

VP OF INTERNATIONAL MARKETING

**REPUBLIC RECORDS/DEF JAM RECORDINGS**

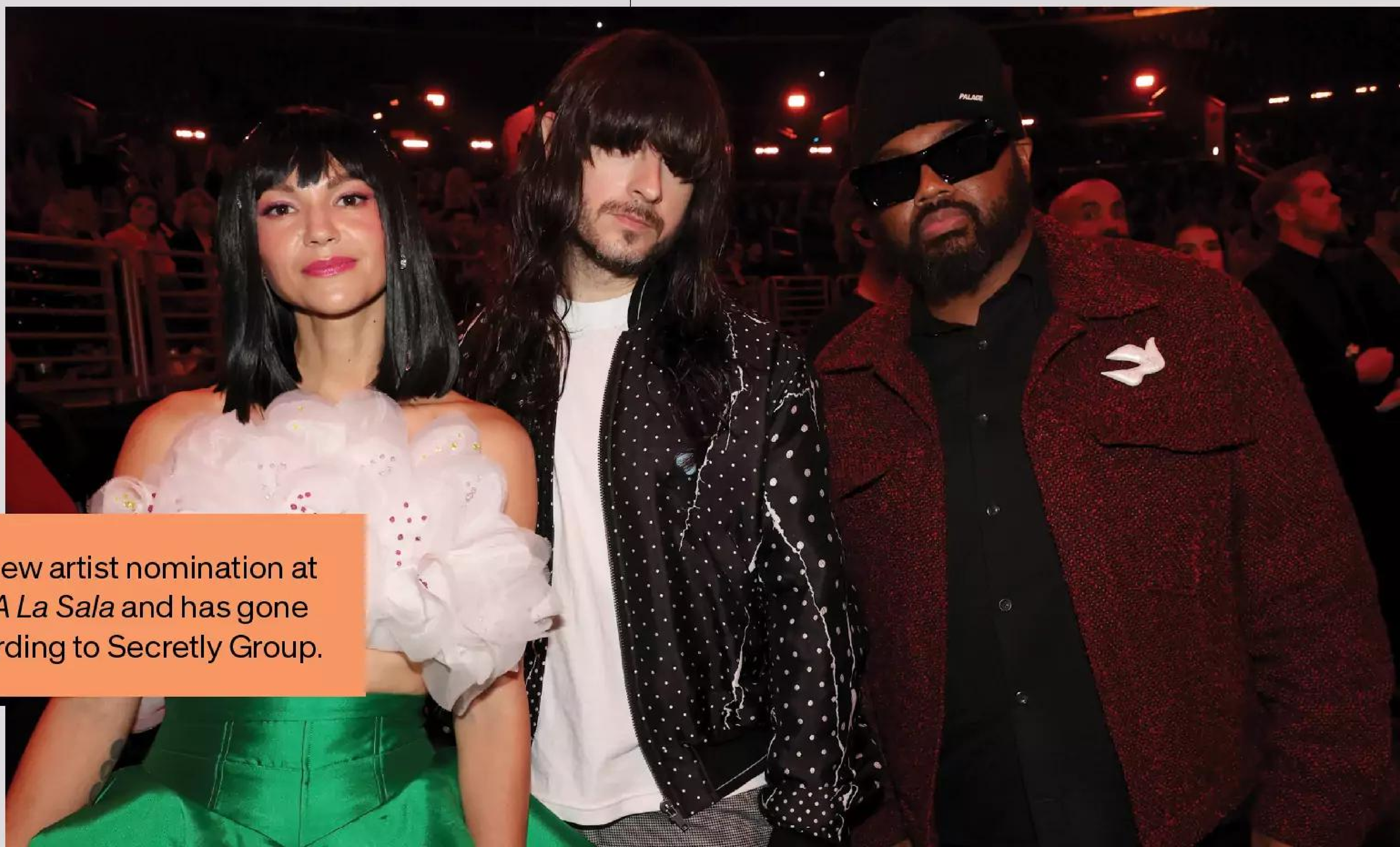
Alexander says 2024 was "a massive year" for REPUBLIC Collective thanks to artists such as The Weeknd, Sabrina Carpenter, Chappell Roan and Noah Kahan. Last year's highlights include Carpenter's *Short n' Sweet* debuting at No. 1 in 15 countries and moving 10 million units globally, according to REPUBLIC, as well as her becoming the first non-British artist to win the global success trophy at the 2025 BRIT Awards. Plus, Roan won best international artist and song at the 2025 BRITs, Kahan's "Stick Season" became the year's No. 1 single in the United Kingdom and the *Wicked* soundtrack broke the record for longest consecutive No. 1 reign on the U.K. Official Compilations Chart.
**Biggest issue now** "I don't see them as issues as much as I see them as opportunities," Alexander says. "There are so many untapped audiences around the world that we're just starting to reach."

### Kaiya Sarkis

GM

**SALXCO UAM**

Sarkis says SALXCO UAM takes "pride in breaking Arabic music, culture and sound globally" since CEO Wassim "Sal" Slaiby founded the label in 2021. Palestinian-Chilean pop star Elyanna, who made history at Coachella in 2023 by becoming the first artist to perform an entire set in Arabic, made her TV debut on *The Late Show With Stephen Colbert* in May 2024. In October, she joined Coldplay alongside Argentine actress-singer-songwriter TINI to perform "We Pray" — which became Elyanna's first Billboard Hot 100 entry, peaking at No. 87 — during the band's *Saturday Night Live* gig. "Our records have also made their mark on U.S. and global charts, including Nancy Ajram, Saint Levant and more," she adds, "further solidifying our commitment to making a lasting impact and expanding the reach of Arabic music worldwide."



JOHNNY NUNEZ/GETTY IMAGES

Texas trio **KHRUANGBIN** earned a best new artist nomination at the Grammys in February with the album *A La Sala* and has gone top 10 in multiple European markets, according to Secretly Group.

*Congratulations to Our 2025*
# International Power Players

## Michael Harrison
SVP, Global Touring, AEG Presents

## Alex Hill
President & CEO, AEG International

## Steve Homer
CEO, AEG Presents UK

## Simon Jones
SVP, International Touring, AEG Presents

## Jim King
CEO, European Festivals, AEG Presents

## John Langford
COO, AEG Europe

## Adam Wilkes
President & CEO, AEG Presents Europe and Asia-Pacific

AEG
PRESENTS

**Ed Scott**
HEAD OF INTERNATIONAL LABEL AND ARTIST MARKETING
**Olukorede "Kay" Ikazoboh**
COUNTRY MANAGER, NIGERIA
**Amit Sharma**
COUNTRY MANAGER, INDIA
**Liza Faudy**
REGIONAL DIRECTOR, SOUTHEAST ASIA
**VIRGIN MUSIC GROUP**

In October 2024, Virgin Music Group expanded its global reach after acquiring Outdustry, known for its artist and label services and rights management across China, India and other large-growth markets. Outdustry founder Ed Peto joined Virgin as senior vp of international strategy. Along with that acquisition, Virgin also scored wins with its Nigerian division. According to Ikazoboh, Virgin Music Nigeria invested more in homegrown ventures such as Dapper Entertainment and Rain Labs in Ghana, with the latter yielding impressive wins, including a Ghana Music Awards nomination for best hip-hop song from local artist Joey B.

**Biggest issue now** "The ongoing struggle for fair and sustainable monetization," Ikazoboh says. "While streaming has revolutionized access to music, revenue structures remain disproportionately skewed in favor of platforms rather than the creators themselves. For African artists and local music companies, this challenge is compounded by limited financial infrastructure, difficulties in collecting royalties across multiple territories and the need for greater industrywide transparency."

**Adriana Sein**
GLOBAL HEAD OF ARTIST AND MARKET DEVELOPMENT
**ADA**
**Howard Corner**
MANAGING DIRECTOR
**ADA U.K.**
**Cesar Lores**
MANAGING DIRECTOR/HEAD OF EU A&R
**ADA IBERIA**
**Ben Ralph**
MANAGING DIRECTOR
**ADA AUSTRALASIA**
**Nikoo Sadr**
VP OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICES AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
**ADA NORDICS**

ADA, the global independent music distribution and artist services division of Warner Music Group, spent the last year-and-a-half focused on growth in key markets. In Latin America, ADA invested in Brazil's Sua Música Group and Venezuelan band Rawayana earned its first U.S. and Latin Grammy wins. In the United Kingdom, ADA renewed its partnership with Sonny Fodera, whose hit track "Somedays" was the country's biggest-selling independent single of the year, according to ADA U.K. In Southeast Asia, ADA deepened its collaboration with DPM, one of Indonesia's largest music companies, and forged a new deal with GMM Music, the region's largest independent label. Plus, Norwegian star Emma Steinbakken won artist of the year at awards show P3 Gull and held the No. 1 spot on local radio for several weeks.

**Biggest issue now** "We need to keep up with how rapidly technology is evolving the way fans discover and consume music," Sein says.

The 40th anniversary of the hit "Forever Young" from German synth-pop group **ALPHAVILLE** has been the focus of a campaign by Budde Music, which partners with Warner Music Group on the act's recordings and publishes its songs globally.

FRYDERYK GABOWICZ/PICTURE ALLIANCE/GETTY IMAGES

**Per Sundin**
CEO
**POPHOUSE ENTERTAINMENT**

In March, Pophouse announced that it had raised over 1 billion euros ($1.1 million) to invest in music rights. The company already has made deals with acts including KISS, Cyndi Lauper, Avicii and Swedish House Mafia. "The Avicii documentary *I'm Tim*, which premiered on New Year's Eve 2024, was met with an overwhelmingly positive response, and we have several projects cooking on all of our catalogs with our fantastic artists," Sundin says. "Our production leg is also thriving. *ABBA Voyage* — the avatar show expanding the legacy of a globally beloved band, and in which we are funding investors — has sold over 3 million tickets in under three years since being launched in May 2022. And *Mamma Mia! The Party* continues to sell out shows in London, Stockholm and Rotterdam [Netherlands]."

**The music business today in a word** "Essential. And it always has been. Throughout history, during times of political chaos or uncertainty, music and entertainment have been a lifeline."

**Darius van Arman**
CEO
**Tom Davies**
DIRECTOR OF GLOBAL MARKETING AND CAMPAIGNS
**SECRETLY DISTRIBUTION**
**Ali Murphy**
SENIOR INTERNATIONAL MARKETING DIRECTOR
**SECRETLY GROUP**

The Secretly Group of labels and Secretly Distribution have been focused on fostering "key markets while working global campaigns, a recent highlight being Grammy-nominated Khruangbin's *A La Sala*, which hit the top 10 across multiple European markets," Murphy says. While the company is predominantly American, she notes that it is gaining solid footing in a number of international markets with albums or singles from Phoebe Bridgers, Mitski and Bon Iver "going gold in the U.K. in the past 12 to 18 months; a true testament to the quality of artists we work with and the teams we've built internationally."

**Biggest issue now** "Secretly is an artist-first company, and while we need to make sure to be pulling all the levers, we're also dealing with real people — artists and fans," Murphy says. "So it's about striking a balance between authenticity, efficiency and creating unique moments that feel true to the artist and to which fans can connect."

**Pieter van Rijn**
CEO
**DOWNTOWN MUSIC**
**Renato Vanzella**
GM OF LATIN AMERICA
**Liz Northeast**
SENIOR VP OF EUROPE, MIDDLE EAST AND ASIA
**FUGA**
**Raymond Tapia**
VP OF A&R, LATIN
**DOWNTOWN ARTIST AND LABEL SERVICES**

Downtown Music CEO van Rijn says this year's awards season was a "testament to the remarkable global talent we have the privilege of supporting." Downtown reports that its artists and writers were involved with more than one-third of this year's Grammy winners and garnered six wins at the Latin Grammys, while its publishing clients won 13 honors at the BMI Latin Awards. Successes came from FUGA client and Th3rd Brain artist Zerb, who topped Spotify's and Shazam's dance charts; Froukje, with the most streamed and best-selling Dutch album of 2024; and Netón Vega, a Peso Pluma collaborator whose debut album, *Mi Vida Mi Muerte*, hit No. 19 on the Billboard 200.

**Biggest issue now** "Striking a balance between embracing innovation while building robust frameworks that protect rights holders and ensure long-term value for artists, songwriters and music businesses is key," van Rijn says.

**Dan Waite**
CEO
**BETTER NOISE MUSIC**

Better Noise has long been one of the most dominant labels in mainstream rock, topping the Mainstream Rock Airplay Labels year-end chart for the third time this decade in 2024, while also claiming the top song (Nothing More's "If It Doesn't Hurt") by the group Nothing More. Waite sees Better Noise as well-positioned to take advantage of streaming-era globalization, as evidenced by its success with Mongolian rockers The Hu. "The music industry today has never had a greater global opportunity for music inclusion and consumption across platforms, technology, communities," he says. "The music taste palate of the world has evolved, and this gives rise to the next breakthrough band being from anywhere."

**Biggest issue now** "There is still only 24 hours in a day, and the music business faces headwinds from attention-competing alternatives for people's time, lack of fair compensation for prior work from AI tech, the squeeze at the new-creator level by thresholds on payment and lack of truly independent distributor routes to market."

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**ALFREDO ALONSO**

*ENTERTAINMENT DIRECTOR*

**DANIEL MERINO**

*ENTERTAINMENT MANAGER*

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## Publishing

**Benjamin Budde**
CEO
BUDDE MUSIC

Over the past decade, Budde Music has expanded from its roots as a music publisher into talent management, concert promotion and the agency business. So in 2024 the company hired Maximilian Paproth to run its German publishing business and global A&R, freeing CEO Budde to drive further growth. The big creative win for the company — the biggest publisher in Germany after the majors and BMG — was celebrating the 40th anniversary of Alphaville's "Forever Young." Budde partners with Warner Music Group on the act's recordings and publishes its songs globally. Its campaign sent the song to No. 1 on the TikTok Billboard Top 50 list and a David Guetta remix with singer Ava Max to No. 2 on Hot Dance/Electronic Songs.

**Nestor Casonu**
PRESIDENT OF LATIN AMERICA
**Stephane Berlow**
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF FRANCE
**Simon Moor**
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF ASIA-PACIFIC
**Frederica Wong**
DIRECTOR OF ASIA
**Swantje Weinert**
SENIOR VP/HEAD OF A&R FOR GERMANY, SWITZERLAND AND AUSTRIA
KOBALT

"We've seen significant growth and success across our international operations," Casonu says, pointing to Kobalt Music Publishing's win for contemporary Latin publisher of the year at the 2025 BMI Latin Awards. (The publisher reports that it represents at least part of seven of the genre's most performed songs in 2024.) "This was a huge milestone for Kobalt and something we are very proud of," he says. "Our regional Mexican catalog continues to evolve. This year alone, we have officially signed Pedro Tovar of Eslabon Armado, Kartel Music, Hitkidz, Kevin Kaarl, Ana Bárbara and many more." Meanwhile, in Asia, Kobalt has secured partnerships with Tencent and NetEase, as well as setting up licensing frameworks for streaming video on demand.

**Biggest issue now** "Artificial intelligence is definitely the biggest issue we face," Casonu says. "AI poses a significant threat due to the lack of regulations or a cohesive plan to control its use within our industry at this moment."

**Justin Dowling**
EXECUTIVE VP OF U.K. AND EUROPE
PRIMARY WAVE
DIRECTOR
BLUE MOUNTAIN MUSIC

The release of the biographical screen drama *Bob Marley: One Love* early in 2024 reenergized the catalog of the pioneering Jamaican reggae artist, Dowling says, creating one of the past year's most notable spikes for the company's roster. Marley's catalog reaching billion-stream status was a huge win for Primary Wave, he says. "We waited a long time for it, and aided by the very successful *One Love* biopic, we achieved this for not one but two songs in the catalog in 2024."

**Biggest issue now** "Music should be cohesive. It should unite us, not divide us. So I am a smidge concerned about where the next stadium-filling act is going to come from that will draw in folks from across all generations and divides."

**Kim Frankiewicz**
EXECUTIVE VP OF WORLDWIDE A&R
CONCORD MUSIC PUBLISHING
**Tina Funk**
MANAGING DIRECTOR
CONCORD MUSIC PUBLISHING GERMANY, SWITZERLAND AND AUSTRIA
**Jaime Gough**
MANAGING DIRECTOR
CONCORD AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

For Frankiewicz, 2024 was a year that "really demonstrated the global blend and reach" of Concord's roster. "While homegrown in the U.K., the global sensation that is [Charli xcx's] *brat* is truly unmatched," she says. "It's been thrilling to be a part of a cultural phenomenon and work with Grammy-winning executive producer A. G. Cook, as well as other contributors from our roster like George Daniel of The 1975, Julian Casablancas and more." After diligently curating and developing a roster of writers and producers around the globe in a variety of genres, Concord found success with producer Sammy Soso's work with South Africa's Tyla, as well as Thai superstar and Blackpink member Lisa, co-writing multiple songs on her breakout solo album, *Alter Ego*.

**Biggest issue now** "One of the biggest issues facing songwriters and publishers is the continually low royalty rates from streaming," Frankiewicz says.

**Shani Gonzales**
MANAGING DIRECTOR
WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC U.K.
HEAD OF INTERNATIONAL A&R
WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC
**Natascha Augustin**
MANAGING DIRECTOR
WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC GERMANY
**Gustavo Menendez**
PRESIDENT, U.S. LATIN AND LATIN AMERICA
**Santiago Menendez-Pidal**
PRESIDENT, SOUTHERN EUROPE
**Arica Ng**
PRESIDENT, ASIA PACIFIC
WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC
**Matthieu Tessier**
MANAGING DIRECTOR
WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC FRANCE

Warner Chappell Music had a fabulous year across all of its territories. Gonzales says she's especially proud of signee Daniel Blumberg, who took home an Academy Award and a BRIT Award for his score for *The Brutalist*; producer P2J for his work on recent Burna Boy and Wizkid tracks; RAYE and Jon Shave for their abilities to "grow from strength to strength … with cuts across the globe"; and Amy Allen's Grammy songwriter of the year win. Allen's co-writes had a combined 11 straight weeks at No. 1 on the Pop Airplay chart in 2024 and 2025. "This win is massive in addressing the lack of recognition for songwriters," Gonzales says.

**Biggest issue now** "The need to respect U.K. copyright law and not let AI companies trade on music without permission," Gonzales says. "The Make It Fair [campaign] was a great show of strength from the U.K. industry and goes to show just how big an issue it really is."

Downtown Music Publishing's deals in the past year included a global partnership with Double P Records, co-founded by Latin superstar **PESO PLUMA**.

**David Gray**
MANAGING DIRECTOR, U.K./HEAD OF GLOBAL A&R
**Alexandra Lioutikoff**
PRESIDENT OF LATIN AMERICA AND U.S. LATIN
**Thomas Vidovic**
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF GERMANY/SENIOR VP OF AUSTRIA AND SWITZERLAND
**Yadira Moreno**
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF MEXICO AND CENTRAL AMERICA/VP OF NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, LATIN AMERICA
**Ana Rosa Santiago**
SENIOR VP OF LATIN MUSIC
UNIVERSAL MUSIC PUBLISHING GROUP

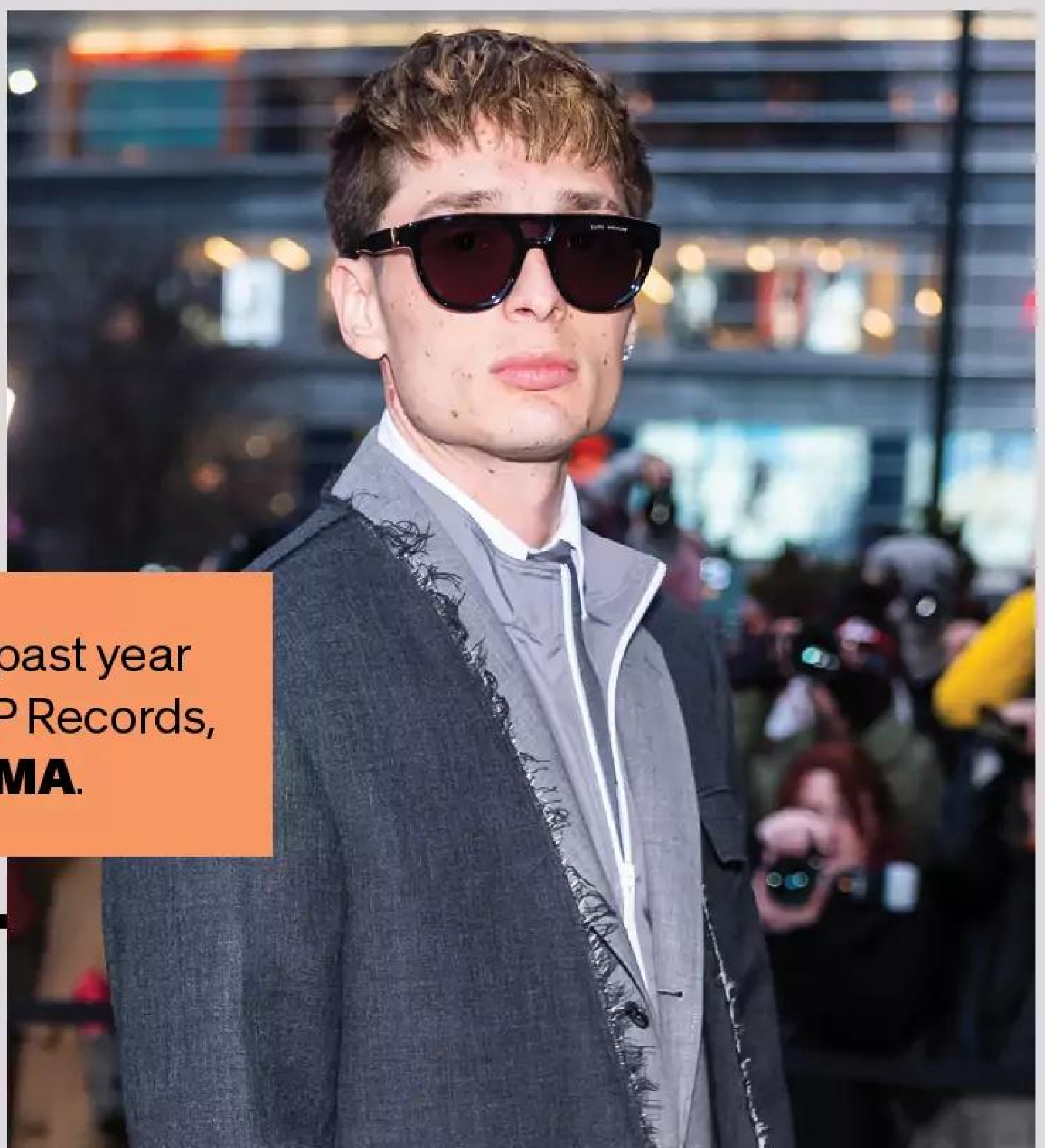
Since UMPG's 2022 launch of its Global Creative Groups — a team of worldwide A&R executives that expand creative opportunities for songwriters across different markets — the major publisher has found multiple ways to use its globe-spanning offices as a competitive advantage. "Whether you're talking about the music, the artists or the business side, the reality is that geographical boundaries are less significant than ever," Lioutikoff says. In the last year, her team earned the ASCAP Latin publisher of the year award and celebrated signings and renewals with some of the best writers and artists in the region, including Carín León, Carla Morrison, Gerardo Coronel, Icon, Telefe, Babasónicos, Grupo Firme, Jorge Mexia, Deolli, JAO and JotaPé. "[It's] another hugely successful year," Lioutikoff says.

**Biggest issue now** "We are constantly fighting for our writers' work to be properly valued and fairly compensated," Lioutikoff says. "The globalization of Latin music is obvious, and we want the monetization to match."

**Ben Katovsky**
CEO
RECOGNITION MUSIC GROUP

It's been a busy few months for Katovsky and his team at Recognition Music Group, the newly rebranded company formerly known as Hipgnosis. Katovsky took over the helm of the catalog giant last year from its founder, Merck Mercuriadis, and is hard at work to reestablish the company after a roller-coaster year that led to Blackstone acquiring its public fund for $1.6 billion. Now Recognition is pivoting to become a "selective buyer" of music rights, as Katovsky puts it. "Recognition Music will be a very collaborative player in this space in ways that it was not historically. We want to work with other partners in this industry to do that."

**Biggest issue now** "Creating a legitimate and fully licensed market for generative AI that both embraces innovation and safeguards and stimulates the future of music and investment in music."



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**Golnar Khosrowshahi**
FOUNDER/CEO
**Annette Barrett**
MANAGING DIRECTOR/GLOBAL STRATEGIC LIAISON
**RESERVOIR**
**Alison Wenham**
COO
**BLUE RAINCOAT MUSIC**
COO
**CHRYSALIS RECORDS**
**Jeremy Lascelles**
CO-FOUNDER/CEO
**BLUE RAINCOAT MUSIC**
**Hussain "Spek" Yoosuf**
FOUNDER/CEO
**POPARABIA**
EXECUTIVE VP OF INTERNATIONAL AND EMERGING MARKETS
**RESERVOIR**

"Reservoir's work in emerging markets continues to be a key strategic element of our business," Khosrowshahi says. The company has been investing heavily through its partnership with PopArabia in the Middle East/North Africa region. One focus has been Egypt, where the company recently completed deals with rappers El Sawareekh, artist Omar Kamal and production/distribution company RE Media. Other deals in the region included Lebanese star Nancy Ajram and her label/publisher, In2Musica, and Saudi Arabian hip-hop label Mashrex.

**Biggest issue now** "A lack of transparency continues to plague the industry," Khosrowshahi says. "We need greater transparency regarding generative AI to ensure concrete copyright protections that yield clarity around, permission for and compensation of [intellectual property] being used to train AI platforms. Second, we need continued greater transparency from DSPs on the royalties paid to publishers and songwriters so we can continue advocating to close the gaps in compensation across the publishing and recorded-music industries."

**Mary Megan Peer**
CEO
**Elizabeth Rodda**
PRESIDENT OF U.S. LATIN, LATIN AMERICA AND GLOBAL SOCIETY RELATIONS
**PEERMUSIC**

Peermusic continued to expand globally, especially in specific European markets like Poland and Norway. The independent publisher acquired Arctic Rights, Norway's largest indie publisher, and also opened its 40th branch in Poland. "We're expecting growth in both of these territories as a result of our direct presence there," Peer says. "We've already had our Norwegian writers work with Asian writers in both Seoul and Taiwan and expect these collaborations to continue." Meanwhile, Rodda, who leads peermusic's Latin American operations, is continuing to build up the company's historically strong presence in the Spanish-speaking world.

**Biggest issue now** "Data," Peer says. "It is the key to getting our writers paid fairly and faster. I'm hopeful that the combination of industry focus and AI computing power will help us attack this challenge."

After a 2024 Australia tour playing 3,000- to 5,000-capacity shows, **GRACIE ABRAMS** returned to the region this spring for a 12-date arena swing promoted by Frontier Touring.

KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES

**Emily Stephenson**
PRESIDENT
**DOWNTOWN MUSIC PUBLISHING**
**Thando Makhunga**
MANAGING DIRECTOR
**SHEER PUBLISHING AFRICA**

Downtown Music Publishing's songwriters contributed to four 2024 Latin Grammy wins, 13 wins at the 2025 BMI Latin Awards and one ASCAP El Premio Award, according to its own tally. The division also struck global publishing deals in 2024 with Latin superstar Peso Pluma's Double P Records and legendary Italian singer Mina, and "Parade" by Downtown Publishing client and French composer Victor Le Masne became the official theme song for the Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games. In addition to helping drive 40% year-over-year growth, Stephenson says these accomplishments helped Downtown achieve "soundtrack global milestones."

**Biggest issue now** "The ongoing fight for fair compensation for songwriters," Stephenson says. "Despite their role in creating the music that drives the industry, songwriters still face disproportionate earnings compared with the value their work generates."

**David Ventura**
PRESIDENT/CO-MANAGING DIRECTOR, U.K./SENIOR VP OF INTERNATIONAL
**Tim Major**
CO-MANAGING DIRECTOR, U.K.
**Jorge Mejia**
PRESIDENT/CEO, LATIN AMERICA AND U.S. LATIN
**Nasra Artan**
HEAD OF INTERNATIONAL A&R
**Johnny Tennander**
MANAGING DIRECTOR, SCANDINAVIA/SENIOR VP OF A&R INTERNATIONAL
**Patrick Strauch**
MANAGING DIRECTOR, GERMANY
**SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING**

To foster the best songwriting around the globe, SMP "places a real emphasis on creative collaboration across territories, with A&R teams working hand in hand with their counterparts on a daily basis," Artan says. "The focus is truly on creating opportunities for our songwriters beyond their home territories and helping ensure their songs travel." In the last 12 months, Artan says the company has hosted songwriting camps in locations including Ghana, Spain, Taiwan and South Africa, inviting talent from around the world to connect and collaborate.

**Biggest issue now** "The continued existence of traditional 'buyout' structures in some emerging markets," Artan says. "In a world where music can go big internationally from day one, it is really important for songwriters and their teams to understand the value of their work and ensure they avoid unintentionally stifling future success and opportunities for a short-term gain up front with these types of deals."

## Live

**Siavash Aghaiepour**
TALENT AGENT
**HRBOOKING**

"Over the past year, we've had the opportunity to execute major international tours and expand our global footprint through strategic partnerships," says Aghaiepour, who has worked with 21 Savage, A$AP Rocky, Cardi B and others. He points to HRBooking's collaborations as an agency and a promoter with companies such as Live Nation and IAG, as well as its support of live events from Coachella and Rolling Loud to Juicy Fest in Australia. The company, which is headquartered in the United Arab Emirates, also secured artist bookings at cultural tentpoles like Fashion Week, the Super Bowl and Formula 1 races. Of the agency, which boasts 30 years in business, Aghaiepour says, "Relationships and loyalty mean everything to us. Our focus is always on doing good, honest business while continuing to grow with integrity and purpose."

**The music industry today in a word** "Fast. The pace of the industry is relentless — from how artists break to how trends shift and content circulates. Things can change overnight, and as a company, we've had to stay nimble, evolve quickly and anticipate the next move."

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**TAKE THAT**'s most recent U.K. tour included a six-night stand at the O2 Arena in London, promoted by SJM Concerts, that drew nearly 91,000 fans.

MARK SUTTON/FORMULA 1/GETTY IMAGES

## Alfredo Alonso
PARTNER/ENTERTAINMENT DIRECTOR
## Daniel Merino
ENTERTAINMENT MANAGER/PROMOTER

**BIZARRO LIVE ENTERTAINMENT**

Bizarro Live Entertainment promoted some of the most important Latin tours in Chile, Peru, Colombia and Ecuador in the last 18 months. Most notably, Karol G's *Mañana Será Bonito* two-show stop at Estadio San Marcos in Lima, Peru, and three-show stint in Chile's Estadio Nacional in April 2024 generated more than $25 million in revenue combined. Other key concerts the company promoted included Maná, Ha*Ash and Duki, all in both Chile and Peru, as well as Emilia in Chile, Peru, Colombia and Ecuador. "We also produce and promote the Viña Del Mar Festival" in Chile, Alonso says, "the most important Latin festival in the world."

**Biggest issue now** "To work and create new spaces and formats for live music in an industry full of concerts," Alonso says.

## Alejandro Arce
CEO

**ZIGNIA LIVE**

Zignia Live's operation includes venue management of Mexico's Arena CDMX and Arena Monterrey and live-event production and ticket sales through its proprietary platform Superboletos. The vertical business model helped it sell over 2 million tickets to 250 events in Mexico last year, including more than 20 stadium dates. Standouts include 24 dates and over 500,000 tickets sold for Los Temerarios' Hasta Siempre Tour, including eight sellouts at Arena CDMX. Zignia also promoted 22 dates for icon Luis Miguel, selling 300,000 tickets, and selling out 10 shows at Arena CDMX. Zignia is the official promoter of the NBA in Mexico, where it hosts games by the Boston Celtics, Miami Heat and Chicago Bulls. "Our next challenge is opening Arena Guadalajara," Arce says. "In addition to promoting shows, we transform experiences."

## Melvin Benn
MANAGING DIRECTOR

**FESTIVAL REPUBLIC**

Benn runs Live Nation-owned Festival Republic, one of the leading U.K. festival promotion companies and home to a portfolio of festivals including Reading & Leeds, Latitude, Wireless, Wilderness, The Great Escape and Electric Picnic. The company also hosts shows at outdoor music venues such as Finsbury Park and Gunnersbury Park. Festival Republic's Wireless Festival won best festival at the 2024 Music Week Awards. Meanwhile, Reading & Leeds benefited from continued innovations with a new, 40,000-capacity open-air Chevron dance stage and featured acts like The Prodigy, Nia Archives and Denzel Curry. Benn has also supported the efforts of Live Nation and the Rio Ferdinand Foundation to increase access to music industry careers. In March, he relaunched the ReBalance initiative to support female and nonbinary artists, which, as he told *Music Week*, "made a genuine positive impact" during its first three years.

## Dion Brant
CEO

**FRONTIER TOURING**

"We're seeing artist trajectories moving faster than ever before, and our team has shown great prowess at thinking one or two steps ahead," Brant says. Gracie Abrams played a sold-out run of 3,000- to 5,000-capacity shows in Australia, which sold roughly 21,000 tickets in 2024. "She is now returning this year to a 12-date arena run that is tracking to sell out at 150,000 tickets," he adds. Likewise, when Benson Boone's single "Beautiful Things" took off, Frontier rebooked his run of shows from sold-out theaters and clubs into sold-out midsize venues, and Teddy Swims has already progressed to a multidate arena tour.

**Biggest issue now** "Climate risk is real. We need to be clever and work out how promoters, affected venues, festivals and artists can work together with the insurance industry to protect everyone in the business — because extreme weather events will continue to happen."

## Chris Bray
PRESIDENT, EUROPE

**LEGENDS/ASM GLOBAL**

"Over the past 18 months, we've made tremendous progress in our European business through transformative redevelopments, strategic expansions and new partnerships," Bray says, highlighting the transformation of Avicii Arena in Stockholm, the redevelopment of AO Arena in Manchester, England, and the launch of the new ChorusLife Arena in Bergamo, Italy. The Legends/ASM Global portfolio has also expanded with the additions of Sheffield City Hall and Sheffield Utilita Arena in England and its expansion in Portugal with taking over operations at Lisbon's LX Factory. "Perhaps our most significant recent achievement has been seamlessly integrating the exceptional teams at Legends with our ASM teams," Bray adds, "creating what I believe is now the best team in the industry."

**Biggest issue now** "One of the biggest challenges in live music is making it sustainable when costs are on the rise."

## Paul Dainty
PRESIDENT/CEO

**TEG DAINTY**

In 2023, Dainty was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia for his "distinguished service to the community," and he continues to distinguish himself. He booked Hugh Jackman's international touring (including dates in Europe and North America) and several Broadway productions including *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical*, which sold more than 780,000 tickets for its Australia run. TEG's 2025 shows include Cyndi Lauper, Katy Perry and comedian Nikki Glaser. The promoter that operates under the umbrella of TEG — the tech, live-entertainment and ticketing company — will also bring video game *Stardew Valley*'s theatrical show, *Symphony of Seasons*, to Australia and New Zealand this fall. Among Dainty's top-grossing shows reported to Billboard Boxscore is a three-night stand by Jerry Seinfeld at the Rod Laver Arena in Melbourne, Australia, last June that grossed $5.5 million.

**Biggest issue now** "Exchange rates for international touring; increased costs across the board."

## Sebastian de la Barra
## Maximiliano del Rio
PARTNERS/PROMOTERS

**LOTUS PRODUCCIONES**

With the launch of Lotus Records — the booking, management and recording-deal division of Lotus Producciones — Del Rio and De La Barra can support local artists with live shows while focusing on international markets. "We are developing our artists from theaters and clubs to arenas and stadiums," Del Rio says, highlighting Easykid's booking at Pal Norte and Vive Latino and Soulfia at Lollapalooza Argentina. Between February and March, Lotus Records also teamed with its artists Francisca Valenzuela, Joe Vasconcellos, Movimiento Original and Lucybell to offer free shows throughout Santiago, Chile, where over 20,000 fans gathered.

**Biggest issue now** "Exploring the development of new venues is a must in today's business," Del Rio says. "Just one arena is not enough for a market like Santiago, with local and Latin live music being so strong after the pandemic."

Congrats to
Paul Firth,
Rocio Guerrero,
Laura Lukanz
& John Murphy
for making it onto the
2025 Billboard Global
Power Players list.

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In March, **SAM FENDER** won the BRIT Award for best alternative rock act after his album *People Watching* earned the biggest opening week for a British solo act since 2022.

### Dennis Desmond
CHAIRMAN
**LIVE NATION U.K. AND IRELAND**

### Dennis Argenzia
PRESIDENT OF GLOBAL TOURING, ASIA PACIFIC
**LIVE NATION**

### Marek Lieberberg
CEO/MANAGING DIRECTOR
**LIVE NATION GERMANY, SWITZERLAND AND AUSTRIA**

### Erik Hoffman
PRESIDENT
**LIVE NATION CANADA**

### John Reid
PRESIDENT
**LIVE NATION EUROPE, MIDDLE EAST AND ASIA**

### Mark Vaughan
SENIOR VP
**LIVE NATION AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND**

### Roberto De Luca
PRESIDENT

### Corrado Rizzotto
HEAD PROMOTER
**LIVE NATION ITALY**

Desmond says that 2024 "was the best year ever for live music with fantastic sales for Coldplay, Taylor Swift, P!nk and incredible growth for artists like Charli xcx, Fontaines D.C., Sleep Token, Chappell Roan, Sabrina Carpenter, RAYE and Teddy Swims." He notes the strong buzz for marquee Live Nation shows from Oasis, Beyoncé, Robbie Williams, Kendrick Lamar/SZA, Lana Del Rey and Drake. "There is nothing better than a good live show," Desmond says. "Artists continue to excel; the future is bright." In February, Live Nation reported it had achieved a record $2.2 billion worldwide in adjusted operating income in 2024, up 14%, on record revenue of $23.5 billion, up 2%. Despite having 30% fewer stadium shows in 2024, the total number of fans grew to a record 151 million from nearly 55,000 Live Nation events, up 9.2% year over year, according to the company.

### Marcelo Figoli
OWNER/CEO
**FENIX ENTERTAINMENT**

Argentina-based conglomerate Fenix Entertainment — which encompasses live shows, amusement parks, soccer teams and media — has achieved many milestones as a global entertainment company. "However, without a doubt, one of the most significant achievements in the past 18 months was Luis Miguel's world tour," Figoli says. The executive partnered with Henry Cárdenas' Cárdenas Marketing Network for Luis Miguel's 2023-24 tour, which became not only the highest-grossing tour by a Latin artist of the year but also the top-grossing tour by a Latin artist ever. The outing welcomed more than 2.8 million fans and grossed over $404.4 million.
**The music business today in a word** "For me, it has always been the same ... happiness."

### Kaori Hayashi
PRESIDENT/CEO
**HAYASHI INTERNATIONAL PROMOTIONS**

HIP leads one of Japan's largest and most established concert promotion companies and enjoyed a string of big-time sellouts in the last year that included two sold-out Dua Lipa shows at Saitama Super Arena, the "Levitating" singer's first arena dates in Japan. Hayashi also booked "a record-breaking seven sold-out Tokyo Dome shows of Bruno Mars in January 2024," she says, along with three sellout Maroon 5 shows at the 55,000-capacity Tokyo Dome, "surpassing the box-office receipts of their groundbreaking 2022 tour in Japan." In April, Live Nation acquired HIP, giving the world's largest concert promoter a major new presence in the market.
**Biggest issue now** "Some resistance to higher-priced tickets, which previously had been the first ticket tier to sell out in Japan."

### Ashish Hemrajani
FOUNDER/CEO
**BOOKMYSHOW**

BookMyShow has played a pivotal role in redefining India's live-entertainment landscape, establishing the country as a must-visit destination on global touring circuits. The company worked with Live Nation to bring the iconic Lollapalooza festival to Mumbai, India, starting in 2022 and, this year, hosted headliners Green Day and Shawn Mendes. "The momentum has been accelerating through pop music as well, with Maroon 5's India tour and the six-city Ed Sheeran +-=÷x Tour spanning seven shows in February 2025, following a successful Mumbai show in March 2024 with over 50,000 fans," Hemrajani says. BookMyShow and AEG Presents Asia co-promoted Sheeran's shows this year. BookMyShow also produced and promoted Coldplay's *Music of the Spheres* world tour across Mumbai and Ahmedabad, which broke the record for the biggest stadium shows in the 21st century.
**The music business today in a word** "Transformative."

### Alex Hill
PRESIDENT/CEO
**AEG INTERNATIONAL**

### Adam Wilkes
PRESIDENT/CEO
**AEG PRESENTS, EUROPE AND ASIA-PACIFIC**

### John Langford
COO
**AEG EUROPE**

### Jim King
CEO OF EUROPEAN FESTIVALS
**AEG PRESENTS**

### Steve Homer
CEO
**AEG PRESENTS U.K.**

### Michael Harrison
SENIOR VP OF GLOBAL TOURING

### Simon Jones
SENIOR VP OF INTERNATIONAL TOURING
**AEG PRESENTS**

AEG reorganized its operations for Asia-Pacific and Europe earlier this year following the sale of its share in ASM Global and a corporate restructuring to bolster its international divisions. Wilkes was named to the new position of president/CEO of AEG Presents, Europe and Asia-Pacific, while Hill was appointed to head of AEG International. Together, they will continue overseeing projects including the development of the 6,000-seat theater and UOB Live entertainment district in Bangkok; the Bangkok Mall Arena, a multipurpose arena project in Nagoya, Japan; and an arena-anchored entertainment district project planned for Expo Park in Osaka, Japan.
**Biggest issue now** "The industry is still recovering from the effects of the pandemic," Harrison says. "Despite some massive recent tours, rising costs, insurance challenges and global economic uncertainty continue to make touring — especially for midlevel artists — financially difficult. These factors hinder artist development and the ability to build international audiences sustainably."

MAX CISOTTI/DAVE BENETT/GETTY IMAGES

# JOHN PHELAN

ICMP DIRECTOR GENERAL

## BILLBOARD 2025 INTERNATIONAL POWER PLAYER

> It's a privilege to be among such company across the music industry. I couldn't be more proud and privileged to work with the team at ICMP, the global trade body for the music publishing industry. Once again this year, they've secured big wins for music publishing companies, their songwriters and composers worldwide.

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The Feldman Agency in Canada booked **AVRIL LAVIGNE**'s 2024 arena tour, which grossed nearly $10 million.

JOE MAHER/GETTY IMAGES

### Walter Kolm
FOUNDER/CEO

### Pascual Egea
HEAD OF EUROPE

**WK ENTERTAINMENT**

Latin music continues to make waves worldwide, and WK Entertainment artists are helping to drive its success. "Maluma is setting the tone for Latin music globally — his + Pretty + Dirty 2025 Tour is selling out arenas across Europe, including three nights at Madrid's Movistar Arena, each with over 15,000 fans," Kolm says. The company also celebrated Carlos Vives' Person of the Year win at the 2024 Latin Grammys, calling it "a well-deserved recognition for his impact on our culture." Rising star Emilia — *Billboard Español*'s February cover star — sold out 10 shows at Movistar Arena in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in April 2024 in 10 hours and packed four nights at Estadio Vélez in Argentina, according to Kolm. "It's an exciting time," he adds, "not just for our artists, but for Latin music as a whole on the global stage."

**Biggest issue now** "Fans just don't have the same [disposable] income as before, and globally, we're seeing the effects," Kolm says.

### Jessica Koravos
PRESIDENT OF INTERNATIONAL

### Gary Hutchinson
EXECUTIVE VP OF GLOBAL TOURING AND CONTENT

**OAK VIEW GROUP**

The U.S.-based Oak View Group opened its first international arena, Co-op Live in Manchester, England, in May 2024 with a show from veteran local band Elbow. Despite several rescheduled concerts and a three-week delay due to safety issues, the arena has been a triumph for the OVG team, and it sold over 1 million tickets for 60 concerts by the close of its first calendar year. And with the launch of OVG Stadia last fall, Hutchinson believes 2025 will be even bigger for the global team. "I would highlight the level of stadium shows we are handling with our clients in 2025," he says. "The market is busier than ever, and we have a huge 2025 ahead."

**Biggest issue now** "Keeping up with the ever-changing ecosystem in such a big business while also meeting the greater consumer demands," Koravos says.

### Simon Moran
MANAGING DIRECTOR

**SJM CONCERTS**

Moran leads Manchester, England-based SJM Concerts, which finished at No. 5 on *Billboard*'s year-end 2024 Top Promoters chart, with the equivalent of $347.6 million and 4.4 million tickets sold across 733 shows. Among SJM's 20 highest-grossing engagements were 10 by pop group Take That, including a six-night stand at London's O2 Arena that sold 90,811 tickets and grossed the equivalent of $11.3 million. SJM has teamed with Live Nation, MCD Productions and DF Concerts for the long-awaited return of Oasis, with the Gallagher brothers booked for a 19-date U.K. and Ireland tour this summer. The company's 2023 year-end financial report stated: "We remain focused on connecting artists with their fans and understanding the needs of the fan base."

### Huston Powell
PROMOTER

**C3 PRESENTS**

Since its inception as a touring festival in 1991, Lollapalooza has staged its U.S. edition at Chicago's Grant Park and, beginning in 2010, has expanded internationally to markets including Chile, Argentina, Brazil, France, Germany and Sweden. In 2022, Lollapalooza India debuted in Mumbai with C3 Presents working alongside Indian promoter-ticketer BookMyShow. "We had our first Lollapalooza India festival sell out this year," Powell says of the event that included headlining performances from Green Day and Shawn Mendes. "This was only our third edition, and our partners, BookMyShow, worked incredibly hard to ramp up and deliver a world-class show in a market where multigenre shows like Lolla have never existed before."

**Biggest issue now** "As a festival promoter, we continually are challenged to look for ways to provide the best fan experience to stand out from the endless options fans have today."

### Klaus-Peter Schulenberg
CEO

**CTS EVENTIM**

With 2024 revenue of 2.8 billion euros ($3.2 billion) — up 19.1% over 2023 — CTS Eventim is Europe's biggest ticketing company and concert promoter, and it's making global moves. In late 2023, the company broke ground on a Milan arena to open in 2026, expanded in South America and France and partnered with AXS on ticketing for the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles. In 2024, the company also closed its deal to acquire See Tickets, which "reinforced our position as one of the world's leading ticketing providers," Schulenberg says. "This unique combination of local expertise and global reach enables us to offer artists a truly international touring platform deeply rooted in local markets."

**Biggest issue now** "One of the biggest opportunities — and responsibilities — for the music industry is to make even better use of data. At CTS Eventim, we already leverage our data to help artists and promoters connect with their audiences more effectively and to create outstanding fan experiences."

### Tricia Silliphant
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF MUSIC AND LIVE ENTERTAINMENT

**MAPLE LEAF SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT**

Despite rising costs, Silliphant and MLSE still find ways to consistently deliver record-breaking grosses, as well as ticket and merchandise sales for Toronto venues like Scotiabank Arena, the Coca-Cola Coliseum and BMO Field. "Toronto is a market known as one of the most culturally diverse cities in the word," Silliphant says. "This rich diversity is mirrored in our venues showcasing an international scope of content." While full-scale renovations are underway at Scotiabank Arena and BMO Field, Silliphant remains more motivated than ever to match the demand for live music across the globe, stating, "We look forward to the continued growth possibilities as we invest to meet the constantly evolving needs of artists and fans alike."

**Biggest issue now** "The rising cost of touring and producing live events is an issue that stands out. From production expenses to travel and labor costs — and, in our case, the fluctuating Canadian dollar — combined with local or venue-specific operating costs, all continue to increase significantly."

### Alejandro Soberón
FOUNDER/CEO

### Leizer Guss Guss
FESTIVALS DIRECTOR

**OCESA**

### Octavio Padilla
DIRECTOR

**OCESA SEITRACK**

Now part of Live Nation, OCESA remains a leader in the live-entertainment landscape across Latin America, particularly in Mexico and Colombia, setting new standards in production, reach and fan engagement. "One of our proudest achievements has been the full renovation of Estadio GNP Seguros — now recognized as the world's leading concert venue," Soberón says of Mexico City's iconic venue formerly known as Foro Sol, home to Shakira's unprecedented seven-show residency as part of her *Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran* world tour. Guss Guss highlights how "fast and effective" OCESA was to jump on the new wave of regional Mexican music with the development of two Mexico City events: Arre Festival and the female-centered Hera HSBC Festival. For Padilla, OCESA Seitrack's alliance with Warner Music on Touring the World, a booking agency based in Colombia to develop Warner's roster in America and Europe, is worth celebrating.

**The music business today in a word** "Unstoppable," Padilla says.

# CONGRATULATIONS

**SUHEL NAFAR**
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF WEST ASIA
AND NORTH AFRICA

**TAEKO SAITO**
SVP BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
AND STRATEGY OF ASIA PACIFIC

**JEFFREY YOO**
SVP OF EAST ASIA

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### Jasmine Young

CO-FOUNDER

**WEST AFRICA MUSIC & ARTS FESTIVAL**

Young says that last June, when the inaugural, four-day West Africa Music & Arts Festival was held in Accra, Ghana, 20,000 fans attended Area Code Jam, the closing-night concert in partnership with Ghana's premiere urban radio station, YFM; Ghanaian singer Black Sherif headlined. "We have built bridges between global music markets and emerging talent in West Africa, opening new pathways for cross-border collaborations and creating sustainable opportunities for artists and music professionals alike," says Young, who is also director of the Warner Music/Blavatnik Center for Music Business at Howard University in Washington, D.C. She adds that this year's WAMA festival will return to Accra in June.
**Biggest issue now** "The lack of practical knowledge for aspiring executives and artists" is a pressing concern, Young says. "Our goal is to educate, excite and empower the next generation of music industry leaders."

In the wake of winning the best new artist Grammy Award in February, **CHAPPELL ROAN** has upcoming festival dates across Europe booked by Wasserman Music.

JOHN SHEARER/GETTY IMAGES

## Agencies

### Emma Banks
### Chris Dalston
### Mike Greek
### Marlene Tsuchii

CO-HEADS OF INTERNATIONAL TOURING

### Nigel Hassler

MUSIC TOURING AGENT

**CAA**

The team guided stars like Charli xcx, Gracie Abrams, Sabrina Carpenter and Tate McRae on global tours in increasingly larger venues, from "theaters to arenas, as well as headlining festivals and stadiums," Tsuchii says. Alongside these young female powerhouses, clients including Sam Fender, Hozier and Noah Kahan achieved similar success on the road. Kahan's 2024 run ranked as one of the year's top-grossing tours, bringing in $102 million and drawing 1.1 million fans. Meanwhile, CAA's music brand partnership department used this momentum to secure major endorsement deals for multiple clients.
**Biggest issue now** "Unfortunately, we are faced with the same issues we have combated for years: rising ticket charges, the secondary-ticketing market and scalping," Tsuchii says. "These issues remain as much of a problem as they have for years, and now, with the rabid young fan base for these rising superstars, the appetite for tickets is unprecedented."

### Matt Bates

MANAGING PARTNER/CEO

### Rick Levy

PARTNER/BOARD MEMBER

### Ben Winchester

BOARD MEMBER/AGENT

### Pete Nash

PARTNER/AGENT

**PRIMARY TALENT INTERNATIONAL**

The powerhouse U.K. indie agency continues to place its artists on the biggest stages, including Glastonbury, where this year clients The 1975 will headline the festival's first night. (Other clients including beabadoobee, Wolf Alice and The Libertines are also on the bill.) After brief stints under ICM and then CAA, Primary Talent International went independent once again in 2023, and Levy says it's proud to "remain an independent music-only agency ... able to book so many of the incredible artists on our roster into the largest international festival in the world, giving fans what they want."
**Biggest issue now** "AI," Levy says. "This will not be the first time that technology has disrupted the business. But the challenge for us as agents is to ensure that the opportunities that are presented benefit not just the labels and big companies operating in our ecosystem but the artists themselves, who are our sole concern."

### Tomas Cookman

FOUNDER

**NACIONAL RECORDS/LATIN ALTERNATIVE MUSIC CONFERENCE**

PARTNER

**MAGNUS TALENT AGENCY**

Cookman — whose Nacional Records label is marking its 20th anniversary with ongoing success by YADAM, Nortec Collective, Los Master Plus, DJ Raff, Marrón and Marco Flores y la Jerez — more recently partnered with Magnus Talent Agency (Marc Anthony and Michel Vega's company) to unite booking and management teams across countries. Cookman also celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Latin Alternative Music Conference. "Both our virtual format and our recent in-person conference, which was our biggest one yet, were impactful to both industry and artists," he says. Cookman adds that on the management side, "the global growing success of Trueno has been a highlight for me."

### Jeff Craib

CEO

### Tom Kemp

PRESIDENT

### Joel Baskin

VP

**THE FELDMAN AGENCY**

Canadian powerhouse The Feldman Agency remained one of the country's key live players in 2024. According to the company, among its achievements are three sold-out Shania Twain performances in Newfoundland (which sold over 45,000 tickets and grossed more than $8 million) and a very successful Avril Lavigne arena tour (which sold over 100,000 tickets for nearly $10 million in gross). "After 50 years in business, we've just celebrated our best year yet," Craib says, citing "a year marked by growth in arena-level touring, exciting new artist signings, talent-buying and a significant year-over-year increase in global bookings."
**Biggest issue now** "The new costs of touring and reaching the fans," Craib says.

### Amy Davidman
### Devin Landau

FOUNDING PARTNERS

**TBA AGENCY**

Over the past year, TBA Agency's clients have expanded their international reach, with Argentina's Ca7riel & Paco Amoroso appearing at such events as Coachella, Glastonbury, Roskilde and Fuji Rock. The company also booked the first shows for artists such as Mexico's Dámaris Bójor and Australia's Delivery. "We are not afraid to get involved early and work with the artist and their team from the ground up," Davidman says. "We believe that hard work and a clear strategy early in an artist's career can really position them for future success."
**Biggest issue now** "With all the current uncertainty worldwide, we are worried about the accessibility of our internationally based artists, our politically outspoken artists and our queer artists," Davidman says. "What can we do as agents to help support not only our clients but also the cultural institutions we lean on for funding and opportunities? We all need to support this touring ecosystem from all angles over the coming years."

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**Lucy Dickins**
GLOBAL HEAD OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC AND TOURING
**Josh Javor**
PARTNER/CO-HEAD OF LONDON OFFICE
**Brian Cohen**
**Rob Markus**
PARTNERS/AGENTS
**James Simmons**
AGENT
**WME**

Among WME clients, Coldplay's *Music of the Spheres* tour surpassed $1 billion in global revenue; Luis Miguel's run has become the highest-grossing tour by a Latin artist of all time; Dua Lipa's *Radical Optimism* tour has sold over 350,000 tickets and grossed $43.4 million so far, with more than 50 dates left on the books through December; and Olivia Rodrigo's *GUTS* tour sold over 1 million tickets. Plus, Linkin Park and Zach Bryan scored huge numbers on tours that continue into 2025. Dickins notes the booking advantage of WME's presence in the Asia-Pacific region and says the agency also recently expanded its Latin division by opening a Miami office. "I'm proud of our truly global presence," she says, "which continues to grow year after year."

**Biggest issue now** "The rising cost of touring continues to be top of mind for us as it affects both artists and fans," Dickins says. "Logistics, travel and accommodation costs have made it more difficult for emerging artists to get out on the road."

**Jon Ollier**
CEO/AGENT
**ONE FIINIX LIVE**

The British firm booked a worldwide arena tour for Japanese artist Ado, "which we hope could become the biggest international tour for a Japanese artist," Ollier says. One Fiinix Live also promoted an eight-city regional tour for Ed Sheeran on the Indian subcontinent, "much of which was a first for a Western artist," he says, and worked on Sheeran's six-night stand in Hangzhou, China. "All of which," Ollier says, "speaks to international business cooperation on a profound scale."

**Biggest issue now** "I am very sad to say it, but I think, yet again, we find our industry's biggest threat intertwined with that of the rest of humanity: global security."

**Peter Pappalardo**
EXECUTIVE VP/HEAD OF GLOBAL TOURING
**Keith Naisbitt**
EXECUTIVE VP OF GLOBAL TOURING
**INDEPENDENT ARTIST GROUP**

"Our international roster continues to grow with headlining talent who had great success this past year," Pappalardo says. That includes Billy Joel, who last August sold out Principality Stadium in Cardiff, Wales; Rod Stewart, who sold out several European arenas and booked the Legends slot at this year's Glastonbury Festival; and Disturbed, Ghost, Falling in Reverse and Ne-Yo, all of whom also sold out arenas on the continent, according to Pappalardo. He adds that grosses for Dream Theater's European and South American shows "were double what they have done in the past."

**Biggest issue now** "Profitability," Pappalardo says. "Ticket sales and fan support have been great, but the cost of touring, along with high taxes, makes for ever-challenging margins."

Paquin Artists Agency signed **JOHN FOGERTY** for representation in Canada.

DIEGO DONAMARIA FOR SXSW

**Julien Paquin**
**Vinny Cinquemani**
CO-PRESIDENTS
**PAQUIN ARTISTS AGENCY**

The Canadian agency had plenty of wins at home — including signing U.S. artists such as The Offspring, John Fogerty and Papa Roach for representation in Canada — but those were just one part of an impressive global expansion. In recent months, Paquin says, "our international business has seen remarkable growth, with record-setting success in Canada and significant breakthroughs across the U.S., Australia, [Middle East and North Africa] and South America." Together, those moves helped Paquin's "touring business [shatter] previous milestones, driving strong engagement and revenue growth across these key markets," he adds.

**The music business today in a word** "Resilient," Paquin says. "The industry has not only adapted but remained strong in the face of challenges, with a major return to live touring fueled by heightened demand, excitement and urgency. This persistence has led to some of the most successful box-office years in recent history."

**Narcís Rebollo Melció**
PRESIDENT/CEO
**GLOBAL TALENT SERVICES**

Originally launched by Universal Music Group in 2007 as a full-service Latin artist services agency focused on management, booking, promotion and brand partnerships, GTS now has 10 offices in key markets, a roster of 150 acts and has "solidified its position as the first global Latin management company," Rebollo Melció says. Notably, according to GTS, Morat's stadium tour generated over $50 million in revenue across 25 stops, David Bisbal's *Todo es Posible en Navidad* album featured a performance atop New York's Empire State Building and Aitana premiered her *Metamorphosis* documentary on Netflix and forged a major partnership with Santander Bank for ticket presales. Additionally, Spanish singer-songwriter Pablo Alborán joined the roster, GTS managed the first edition of the talent show *Operación Triunfo* on Amazon Prime and its direct-to-consumer platform sold over 1 million tickets, "a testament to the company's innovative approach, utilizing technology, data and [customer relationship management] to benefit the artists," Rebollo Melció adds.

**Neil Warnock**
CO-HEAD OF U.K./HEAD OF GLOBAL TOURING
**Irene Agbontaen**
DIRECTOR OF ARTIST BRAND STRATEGY, MUSIC BRAND PARTNERSHIPS
**Tom Jones**
**Scott Mantell**
**James Wright**
MUSIC AGENTS
**UTA**

Wright says that UTA has been "increasingly strategic and intentional" about building teams around the company's clients, a roster that includes global superstars and touring juggernauts such as Karol G and Bad Bunny. The approach is "really delivering" as the agency and its clients maneuver in an increasingly dynamic international market. "As our teams become more than the sum of their parts," Wright says, "we're unlocking new opportunities for our artists — be that new audiences in live or connecting them to the right brand and commercial partners."

**Biggest issue now** "Costs," Wright says. "On the artist side, touring has become increasingly expensive due to inflation, rising production costs and logistical challenges, making it difficult for artists to break even. On the venue side, operating costs are substantial, making it especially challenging for grassroots venues to remain financially viable — despite their crucial role in nurturing the next generation of headliners."

**James Whitting**
EXECUTIVE VP/MANAGING EXECUTIVE
**Dave Blackgrove**
**Michael Harvey-Bray**
**Adele Slater**
SENIOR VPs
**Anna Bewers**
VP
**WASSERMAN MUSIC**

Whitting says Wasserman Music "continues to be the agency known for breaking acts globally," citing the incredible success of Chappell Roan as a "great, recent and obvious" example, but "there are plenty more." He calls this sustained success a testament to the company's strength in A&R, but also a function of its creative approach to touring and long-term career development. "The old, traditional ways don't work anymore," Whitting says. "You need to think differently, tour differently, market differently and time everything perfectly at global scale. When all those things work together in concert — no pun [intended] — the results are plain for all to see."

**The music business today in a word** "Live," Whitting says.

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## Associations

### Manuel Abud

CEO

**LATIN RECORDING ACADEMY**

This year, the Latin Recording Academy announced a new field and category for best music for visual media and a new category for best roots song — singles or tracks only — as well as revisions to the names or rules for six other categories. "Music is dynamic, and the landscape continues to change with the lines between genres becoming less defined as creators develop a fusion of sounds," Abud says. The Latin Grammys return this year to their longtime base in Las Vegas, following ceremonies in Spain in 2023 and Miami in 2024. Interest in hosting the next Latin Grammy Week has since been enormous. "We have defined and implemented a formal [request for proposal] process for potential host cities," Abud says, "and the response has been overwhelming."

**The music business today in a word** "Strong. The mainstream cultural powerhouse that is Latin music is undeniable, with Spanish-language artists topping global streaming charts and flexing unprecedented dominance on the world stage."

With four victories, **JUAN LUIS GUERRA** was the top winner at the 2024 Latin Grammy Awards, which was held in Miami. The event will return to Las Vegas this year.

ZAK BENNETT/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

### Charlie Lexton

COO

**MERLIN**

In the last year, Merlin has focused on data. "The data analytics capability we have built within Merlin allows us to take the vast array of data received under our partnerships around the world and transform it into actionable intelligence [that delivers] unique insights to our record label and distributor members," Lexton says. "These insights are derived from billions of streams generated by music from tens of thousands of record labels globally, helping our members to better understand audience behavior, optimize revenue opportunities and make data-driven strategic decisions, equipping them to thrive in a highly competitive and ever-evolving digital music landscape."

**Biggest issue now** "Accepting and embracing that AI isn't Napster, it's fire. By 'fire,' I mean it would be a mistake to treat the advent of AI as merely a technological disruption. It is a fundamental transformation."

### Victoria Oakley

CEO

**IFPI**

Oakley, who joined IFPI in June, says the global recording business trade organization's March 2025 Global Music Report "was a great moment for IFPI," as well as for her. "This year's report tells a fascinating story of an industry that continues to evolve and innovate" as IFPI's member labels continue to invest in artists while facing challenges from online distributors and AI music — which Oakley identifies as the industry's biggest issue. "It is very clear that the developers of generative AI systems are using copyright-protected music to train their models without authorization," she says. "This poses a massive threat to human artistry."

**The music business today in a word** "Innovative."

### John Phelan

DIRECTOR GENERAL

**INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF MUSIC PUBLISHERS**

In 2024, ICMP's efforts helped get the Artificial Intelligence Act passed by the European Union, which, among other things, requires technology companies to keep detailed records of data sets used to train generative AI so copyright holders can track (and potentially block) usage. "The team here eats up the biggest industry difficulties for dinner," Phelan says. "The ICMP team has engaged with more than 100 laws around the world that directly affect the world's music publishing companies and the tens of thousands of songwriters and composers they represent. Almost 40 of those are different AI laws."

**Biggest issue now** "That if we're to succeed and build the basis for future growth, it's a case of moving hundreds of needles, not a handful, as in the past. So increasing digital streaming rates, growing emerging markets, preventing risks to business, enabling licensing efficiency, shortening long tails, preventing commercial-scale piracy, technologizing metadata, working with every government out there... there are no shortcuts to 'right.' "

### Helen Smith

EXECUTIVE CHAIR

**IMPALA**

Smith, as IMPALA's executive chair, has led the nonprofit organization in "taking a stance on tricky issues that are pivotal for the whole sector, and we have a few right now — consolidation, reform of streaming, remuneration, AI, [electronic data interchange], sustainability and basic copyright, including in the USA," where recording rights holders are not compensated for radio play, she says. "Our members are leaders and their work at labels is more important than ever, as illustrated in the first report published last year by ORCA [the Organization for Recorded Culture and Arts], the think tank for international independent labels."

**Biggest issue now** "The need to invest in diversity to grow the market. We believe our streaming plan has many of the answers, as it identifies diversity as holding the biggest potential for the whole market to grow. However, juggernaut economics as manifested in consolidation and two-tier streaming allocation models are getting in the way."

## Rights Groups

Honorees in this sector were chosen solely by *Billboard*'s editorial team and not through industry nominations.

### Casper Bjørner

CEO

**STIM**

In 2023, the Swedish collective management society celebrated its 100th anniversary with record-high revenue of 3.1 billion krona ($291.9 million), up 14.2% from the previous year. STIM expects that its 2024 results (to be announced in May) will surpass that, fueled in part by the success of Swedish songwriters in K-pop, which STIM has supported with the public-private partnership Export Swedish Music. Like its sister societies when it comes to AI, Bjørner says STIM is developing a licensing framework that embraces the technology while protecting creators' rights. "We're always in the room" with policymakers, he adds, "making sure there's a balance."

**The music business today in a word** "Ever-changing."

### Andrea Czapary Martin

CEO

**PRS FOR MUSIC**

U.K. collecting society PRS for Music distributed in 2023 943.6 million pounds ($1.3 billion) in royalties, 13% more than the previous year, and its revenue broke the billion-pound barrier. For 2024, it expects to distribute over 1 billion pounds ($1.3 billion). Czapary Martin is driving innovation to lower costs, and last year PRS reduced multiterritory online administration fees by 20%. "We continue to drive industrywide improvements in metadata management through our Nexus project," Czapary Martin says. "I can't wait to see the long-term improvements it will bring over the coming years to songwriter credit identification and royalty accuracy."

**The music business today in a word** "Globalized. Music is increasingly transcending geographic boundaries, with music creators from all over the world collaborating and blending diverse cultural influences."

billboard

2025

# COUNTRY POWER PLAYERS

*Billboard's* 12th annual Country Power Players issue will profile the people who have driven another solid year for country music in sales, streaming and publishing. This special feature will highlight those who have had the greatest impact in the genre, including recorded music, live entertainment and publishing, in the past year.

Advertise in *Billboard's* Country Power Players issue to congratulate this year's honorees while reaching key decision-makers who are driving the music business.

## BONUS DISTRIBUTION

Billboard Country Power Players Cocktail Party & Awards on June 4, TBD in Nashville

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**Touring & West Coast** Cynthia Mellow | cmellow615@gmail.com
**International** Ryan O'Donnell | rodonnell@pmc.com

**ISSUE DATE** 5/31 | **AD CLOSE** 5/20 | **MATERIALS DUE** 5/22

## Tobias Holzmüller

CEO

**GEMA**

The German collective licensing society took in 1.3 billion euros ($1.4 billion) in 2024, 4% more than in the previous year. "We're still growing faster than the German economy," Holzmüller says, "and we have a transformative agenda in terms of speed and transparency." It has also taken a lead in protecting creators' rights from AI companies — suing OpenAI and Suno for copyright infringement in the course of training their algorithms — in cases that could shape the future of the technology in Europe. GEMA is also setting up a series of cooperative initiatives with other societies, including One Arena, a multiterritory platform for big tours.

**The music business today in a word** "Solid."

## Peter Leathem

CEO

**PPL**

PPL continues to break revenue records, having surpassed 300 million pounds ($396 million) in collections in 2024, the organization's 90th year in business. "Collections are up over 100 million pounds [$132 million] in the last decade" since 2014, Leathem says. In 2014, PPL paid over 60,000 performers and recording rights holders, while last year, it paid over 172,000 performers and rights holders, he adds. Also, PPL collections include taking responsibility for neighboring rights internationally, which it has been doing for around 20 years. "Today, PPL is the leader, with 113 agreements with CMOs [collection management organizations], covering 95% of the neighboring rights markets by value," Leathem says. Lastly, he adds that PPL has recruited and retained hundreds of performers as members, including Charlie xcx, Lewis Capaldi and the estate of John Lennon.

## Gadi Oron

DIRECTOR GENERAL

**CISAC**

As head of the international trade organization of collecting societies, Oron helps steer a thriving sector of the music business — global revenue grew 7.6% to $12.7 billion in 2023 and is up 31.7% since 2019. Oron supports that growth by advocating for creators' rights in AI and CISAC supported the first global economic study on its possible effects. Oron also helps drive innovation in collections and distributions, and CISAC is working to modernize the data exchange system CIS-Net and to expand the International Standard Musical Work Code system that identifies works to get creators paid faster and more accurately.

**The music business today in a word** "Supercharged."

## Cristina Perpiñá-Robert

CEO

**SGAE**

Over the past year, SGAE has achieved record-breaking collections of 390 million euros (over $423 million), the highest in its 125-year history, while international revenue has reached an all-time high of 35 million euros ($40 million). "We have also focused on continuous modernization to enhance efficiency, transparency and accuracy in royalty collection and distribution," Perpiñá-Robert says, noting that a key achievement has been the implementation of digital tracking technology to better monitor music usage, particularly on streaming platforms. Among other significant accomplishments: "securing a 5% cap on publishing returns from TV broadcasters, a major step toward fairer and more transparent distributions."

**Biggest issue now** One trend that will erode the sustainability of the music industry is "festival promoters disputing fair tariffs, arguing that music is not the primary asset in their business models."

## Cécile Rap-Veber

CEO

**SACEM**

Over the past few years, the French collective rights management society has set successive records for both revenue and distributions: In 2023, it took in 1.5 billion euros ($1.6 billion) and distributed 1.2 billion euros ($1.3 billion), increases of 5% and 17%, respectively. Much of that success reflects Rap-Veber's modernization efforts, including the current SACEM 2030 strategy, which emphasizes collections efficiency (SACEM reduced its expense ratio to a historical low of 10.8%) and service for members. SACEM also worked with Deezer to apply the artist-centric royalty model to the streaming service's publishing payouts.

**Biggest issue now** "One of the main challenges facing the music business today lies in the growing impact of artificial intelligence. AI raises crucial questions about the transparency and remuneration of works used to develop these tools."

## Jose Luis Sevillano

CEO

**AIE**

Sevillano has positioned the artist performing rights society AIE as "the key bridge between Europe and America." Based in Spain, AIE represents the rights of over 40,000 artists and has expanded beyond Spain to the "neighboring rights" of Spanish-language performers around the world. "We have established ourselves as the leading organization in managing the Spanish-language Latin repertoire with a continuous and sustained increase in artists," Sevillano says. Last year, AIE achieved "record-breaking" distribution of royalties to its artists and developed advanced platforms to establish a Spanish Music Data Space that will contain all information on Spanish music, including consumption, export numbers and individual artists' royalty numbers in a single place.

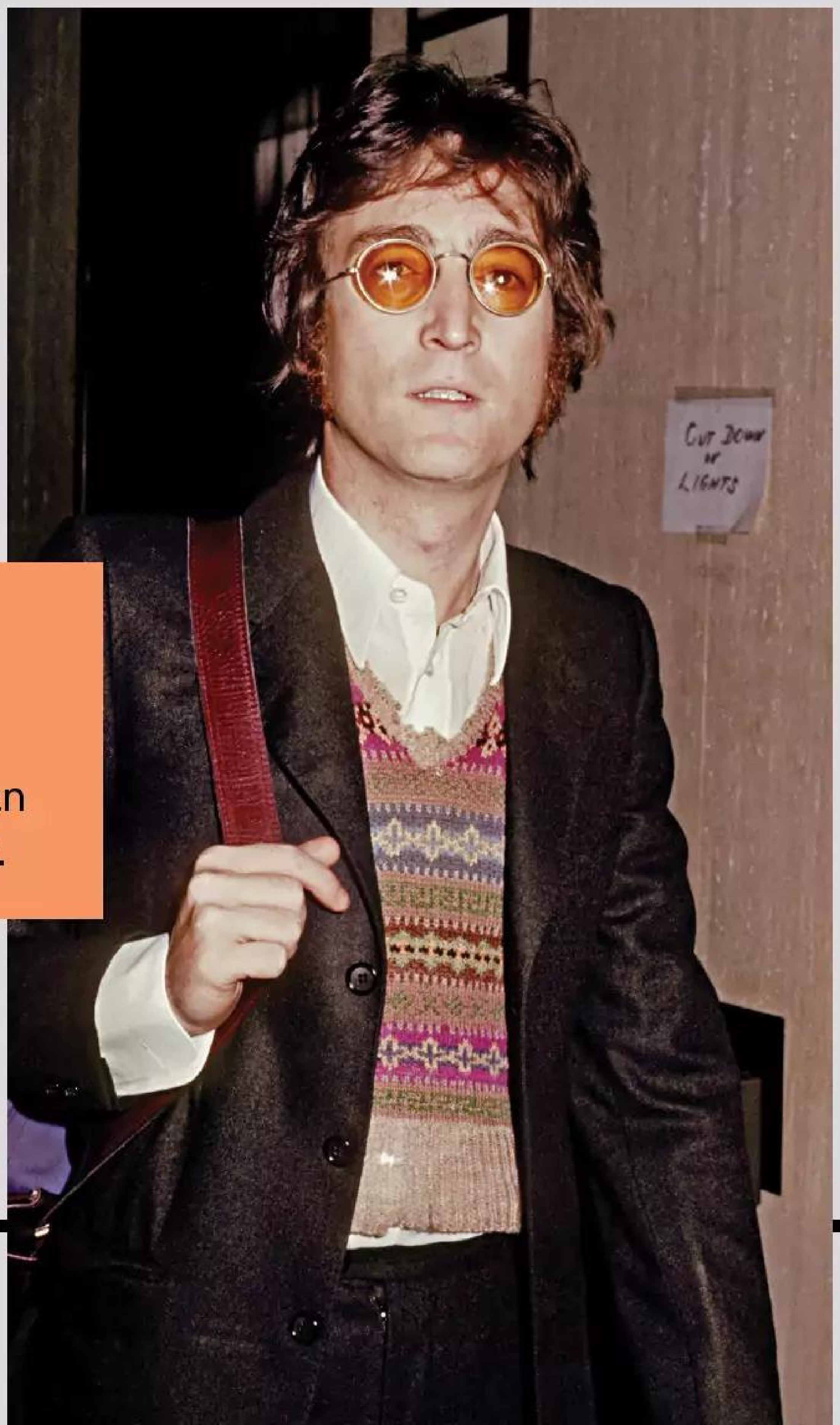
**The music business today in a word** "Disruption, first and foremost, in the sense of a radical change that completely reshapes the way this industry operates. Disruption also in how new musical content is being created across all areas: video games, audiovisual productions and mainstream music." ▣

## Contributors

Trevor Anderson, Nefertiti Austin, Katie Bain, Dave Brooks, Eric Renner Brown, Anna Chan, Ed Christman, Leila Cobo, Janine Coveney, Hannah Dailey, Thom Duffy, Chris Eggertsen, Griselda Flores, Eric Frankenberg, Raquelle "Rocki" Harris, Lyndsey Havens, Gil Kaufman, Steve Knopper, Carl Lamarre, Elias Leight, Robert Levine, Jason Lipshutz, Joe Lynch, Heran Mamo, Elizabeth Dilts Marshall, Taylor Mims, Gail Mitchell, Melinda Newman, Jessica Nicholson, Glenn Peoples, Sigal Ratner-Arias, Isabela Raygoza, Kristin Robinson, Jessica Roiz, Dan Rys, Michael Saponara, Crystal Shepeard, Andrew Unterberger

## Methodology

*Billboard*'s Global Power Players (published in previous years as International Power Players) recognizes high-achieving music executives whose primary responsibility is outside the United States, from the selected industry sectors shown. Nominations for all of *Billboard*'s industry-sourced executive lists open no less than 150 days in advance of publication, and a submission link is sent by request before the nomination period. (Please email thom.duffy@billboard.com for inclusion on the email list for nomination links and for how to obtain an editorial calendar.) *Billboard*'s Global Power Players were nominated by their firms and chosen by editors based on factors including their company's impact on consumer behavior, as measured by *Billboard* charts; sales and streaming performance; market share; revenue, or, where not available, *Billboard* revenue estimates, which may be aided by company guidance; social media impressions; and radio audiences reached, using data available as of March 30. Career trajectory and momentum were also considered. Where required, U.S. record-label market share was consulted using Luminate's current market share for albums, plus track-equivalent and streaming-equivalent album consumption and *Billboard*'s quarterly top 10 publisher rankings. Unless otherwise noted, Billboard Boxscore and Luminate are the sources for tour grosses and sales/streaming data, respectively.



U.K. performance society PPL will collect broadcast and public performance royalties for the estate of **JOHN LENNON** under an agreement announced in October.

VINNIE ZUFFANTE/GETTY IMAGES

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INDIE
POWER
PLAYERS

2025

# INDIE
# POWER PLAYERS

On June 7, *Billboard* will publish its annual Indie Power Players list. This special feature in advance of Indie Week (June 9-13) and the 15th annual Libera Awards will profile leading executives at top independent record labels, music publishers and distribution companies. Positioning themselves as the driving force behind the success of the independent music industry, these executives contribute to both the indie sector and the world of music at large.

Take this opportunity to advertise and congratulate this year's 2025 Indie Power Players.

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**International:** Ryan O'Donnell | rodonnell@pmc.com

**ISSUE DATE** 6/7 | **AD CLOSE** 5/27 | **MATERIALS DUE** 5/29

## chartbreaker

# ROLE MODEL

### How the singer-songwriter's fans (and some famous friends) helped make "Sally, When the Wine Runs Out" a hit

BY LYNDSEY HAVENS

On Feb. 27, during Role Model's No Place Like Tour stop in Dallas, something fortuitous happened: With some last-minute coordination, influencer Jake Shane appeared onstage for the singer's pop-rock song "Sally, When the Wine Runs Out." "People loved it — like, lost it," Role Model recalls. "We were like, 'Why not do this every night? It will be fun to do a Justin Bieber "One Less Lonely Girl"-type of moment.' "

Ever since, Role Model, 28, has welcomed one lucky fan onstage each show to dance around with him during the bridge of the uptempo, breezy breakout song — with viral moments helping the hit sustain. At one of two sold-out shows at Los Angeles' Wiltern theater in April, he welcomed friend Reneé Rapp to play the part; later that month, Bowen Yang appeared for "Sally" during Role Model's late-night TV debut on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*.

"Sally, When the Wine Runs Out" arrived Feb. 14 as part of the deluxe edition of Role Model's second album, *Kansas Anymore*. The deluxe featured four new tracks, but "Sally" emerged as "something we could jump off of," says Sam Riback, Interscope Geffen A&M co-president/head of pop/rock A&R. "Sally" debuted on *Billboard*'s Alternative Airplay chart dated May 3. It has also since reached the top 20 on Hot Rock & Alternative Songs and No. 12 on Hot Alternative Songs.

Riback first heard of Role Model, born Tucker Pillsbury, in 2018; at the time, Benny Blanco had an imprint with the label called Friends Keep Secrets, and an employee tipped Riback about the then-unknown artist from Cape Elizabeth, Maine, making music in his college dorm room. "I heard this demo called 'Minimal' — it captivated me," Riback recalls of the stripped-down, hip-hop-inspired indie track. In 2018, Role Model signed to Interscope Records. (He signed with Best Friends Music for management in 2020, though parted ways with the firm in April.)

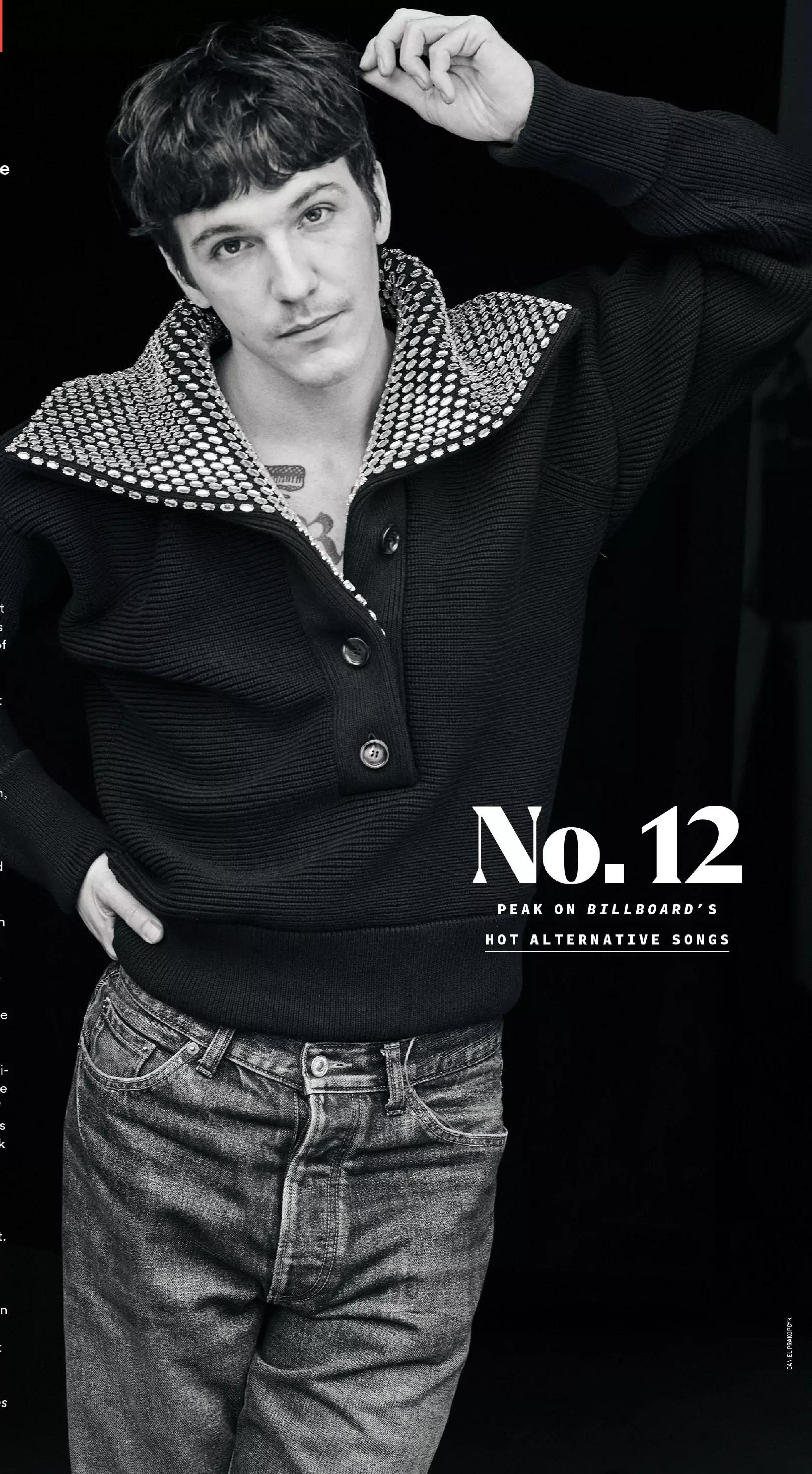
In 2022, Role Model released his debut album, *Rx*, which showcased an edgier look and more alternative sound. But *Kansas Anymore* turned toward softer, more Americana-inspired indie-pop. "People listening to me since 2017 have gotten to watch me figure out music," he says. "I feel like I did not find my sound until *Kansas Anymore*. It feels like the most genuine thing I've made."

After the album arrived last July, Role Model had two "rough ideas that were not fleshed out" that fit into that universe. But as he toyed with the idea of a deluxe, he knew he would need more: He started writing and out came "Sally."

The song is "an entryway for people to see what Tucker's been building so sturdily over the past seven years," Riback says. "He has meticulously put together a fan base that is along for the ride, wherever this goes next."

Role Model has his eye on Kacey Musgraves as a future onstage Sally, with the two slated to appear at Iowa's Hinterland and Aspen, Colo.'s Up in the Sky festivals in August. He has also been writing in between his tours, but much like his career, he's not rushing, calling his rise "a very slow incline." He admires the way Gracie Abrams, for whom he has opened, has navigated her own career, saying she is "an amazing example."

"It's always scared me, the idea of a moment and a giant peak in a career, because it's the hardest thing to keep up with," he adds. "I'm trying not to live in it, but at the same time, I'm doing everything in my power to make sure it *does* stick around."



**No. 12**

PEAK ON *BILLBOARD'S* HOT ALTERNATIVE SONGS

DANIEL PRAKOPCYK

billboard

### 2025

# PRIDE ISSUE

On June 21, *Billboard* will publish its seventh annual Pride Issue, honoring culturally moving and influential people who have contributed to the community's history and its current landscape. Year-round, *Billboard* covers LGBTQIA+ issues across our editorial channels, including Billboard Pride. Building on this platform, *Billboard* will dedicate the month of June to celebrate love, acceptance, diversity and what it means to be queer in music.

All month long, *Billboard* will be the go-to destination for music- and entertainment-related Pride content. Leveraging our iconic voice within music and culture, *Billboard* will curate a mix of engaging video and social content featuring thought-provoking panels, heartfelt performances and glam tutorials — all in the spirit of building a community for consumers and influencers in celebration of Pride.

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**International** Ryan O'Donnell | rodonnell@pmc.com

**ISSUE DATE** 6/21 | **AD CLOSE** 6/10 | **MATERIALS DUE** 6/12

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